

## THIRD INDIA-AFRICA FORUM SUMMIT

### **Ashok Sajjanhar**

*Former Amb. of India to Kazakhstan,  
Sweden & Latvia, & Former  
Secretary/Principal Executive Officer,  
National Foundation for  
Communal Harmony*

*Africa is no longer a "Hopeless Continent", but has emerged as the "Cape of Good Hope". Six of the world's ten fastest growing economies are located in Africa. Huge complementarities exist to strengthen bilateral collaboration in diverse areas and upgrade India-Africa engagement in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, infrastructure, education, healthcare, mining, tele-communications, energy exploration etc. The "Third India-Africa Summit" is hence a far-reaching and significant initiative by the Narendra Modi Government as it represents the first bold move to expand and diversify India's relations with Africa.*

India will be hosting the third India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) in New Delhi from 26th to 30th October, 2015. Invitations have been extended to all 54 Heads of State / Government (HOS/G) in Africa as well as President of the African Union. It is expected that more than 50 HOS/G and Ministerial Representatives will participate in the meeting making it the largest high-level diplomatic gathering ever to take place in India. The number of top leaders from Africa is expected to far exceed the biggest congregation of world leaders in India so far which occurred during the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in New Delhi in 1983.

The Summit represents the maiden foray by the Modi Government to expand, strengthen and deepen India's relations with Africa. India of course enjoys historical, cultural and civilisational links with the continent. In more recent times Mahatma Gandhi's stay in Africa from 1893 to 1915 when he perfected the instruments of ahimsa and satyagraha which he used so effectively during the Indian freedom struggle, and India's principled and unwavering fight against colonial rule and apartheid in Africa have further strengthened our ties and brought us closer together.

In the first two versions of IAFS which took place in 2008 in New Delhi and in 2011 in Addis Ababa, only 15 leaders from Africa were invited. These Summits took place in accordance with the Banjul formula under which invitations were issued to African leaders through the African Union based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to heads of Regional Economic bodies. Decision to expand the invitee list for the 3rd Summit to include all African countries was taken by PM Modi soon after the Government assumed power last year.

The Third Summit was originally scheduled to take place in 2014 but on account of the widespread Ebola scare in western parts of Africa, it was considered prudent to postpone the same to October this year. It was felt that it might be indelicate and embarrassing for visiting African leaders to be seen away from home in comfortable and luxurious settings while Ebola was raging through their countries.

Among those who have confirmed participation are Presidents of South Africa Jacob Zuma, of Egypt Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe and of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari. More than 1,000 delegates including HOS/G, ministers, officials and business leaders are expected to descend on Delhi for the event.

The first two days of the Meeting on 26th and 27th Oct will be devoted to senior official and ministerial deliberations. The Summit with participation of HOS/G will take place on 29th Oct. Bilaterals between PM Modi and visiting HOS/G are slated for 30th Oct.

This is a far-reaching and significant initiative by the Government as it represents the first bold move to expand and diversify India's relations with Africa. Over the last 17 months that the Government has been in power, PM Modi and his External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj have traversed the whole globe. However a concerted move to reach out to Africa has not been evident so far. This lacuna will get addressed in a most effective manner with the forthcoming third India-Africa Summit.

It is indeed high time that this pro-active initiative was launched and energetically pursued. Africa is no longer a "Hopeless Continent". On the contrary it has emerged as the "Cape of Good Hope". Six of the world's ten fastest growing economies are located in Africa. The continent is blessed with large quantities of fossil fuel and mineral resources. 10% of world's oil reserves, 40% of world's gold, 80% of global platinum, chromium and molybdenum reserves, and 24% of arable land of the world are located in this continent. Sub-Saharan Africa has achieved annual growth of more than five percent over the last decade. Foreign investment has more than quadrupled over the same period. A commodities boom and huge increase in consumer spending is evident. Africa is the richest continent in the world with the poorest population because most of its wealth is buried beneath the ground in form of mineral reserves. But now these riches are starting to get exploited and mined. In addition, the continent is endowed with a huge demographic dividend. Like India, 65% of its population is below 35 years. This provides a great opportunity to leaders and people of the continent to utilize their assets to register impressive economic gains to provide a life of dignity and prosperity. With more than 30 nations of the continent moving towards democracy, this has already started happening.

The objective of the summit is to significantly expand the growing relations between India and African countries, both at bilateral as well as at Regional level. Trade between India and Africa currently stands at USD 70 billion with Indian investments in Africa hovering around USD 30 billion. These figures are considerably below potential. Discussions during the Summit are likely to identify new areas to give a fillip to bilateral trade in the coming years.

India has contributed significantly to capacity development in Africa having trained around 15,000 professionals from 2008 to 2011, and 25, 000 more since the second IAFS till now. India provided USD 7.5 billion of concessional credit during the past two summits. This has proved to be immensely beneficial in economic development of most countries in the African continent. The amount has been utilized across 137 projects in 41 countries. Both India and Africa realize that strength of India's partnership with African countries rests on the fact that India's assistance is

neither exploitative nor prescriptive but depends on needs of individual collaborating African States determined as a result of bilateral deliberations.

Boosting trade and investment, promoting peace and security, UN reforms, counter-terrorism, ensuring maritime security, hydrography, peace-keeping initiatives, climate change, exploring ways to deal with scourge of poverty, disease, illiteracy and hunger, and development of the Blue Economy are expected to be major areas of deliberations and decisions at the Summit. Ways to strengthen cooperation with various African blocs including Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern African Customs Union (SACU), and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) will be identified as these forums are active in promoting trade and investments.

India is the world's fastest growing emerging economy. Huge complementarities exist to strengthen bilateral collaboration in diverse areas and upgrade our engagement in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, infrastructure, education, healthcare, mining, tele-communications, energy exploration etc. There is a need for increased productivity in the farm sector, for smart agriculture, for environment-friendly farm mechanization and for promoting gene pools and better seeds in Africa. India can help in all these fields.

India's dynamic private sector is poised eminently to contribute notably to strengthening bilateral ties. Several big Indian corporates viz Tatas, Bharti Group, Essar Group, Reliance, Kirloskar, Godrej etc are already well-positioned in Africa. Their numbers and areas of operations can increase significantly.

The 2.7 million strong Indian diaspora that has developed deep connections can revitalize our engagement with the continent. This resource has not been used effectively so far. Indians are regarded highly in Africa as they have acquitted themselves most creditably in whichever field of business or profession they have been engaged in. In most African countries Indians are either perceived in the role of teachers as this is the work for which several of them initially went to Africa, or as soldiers because of the commendable work they have done as members of peace keeping operations. Indian films and actors and heroines of Bollywood are also extremely popular in Africa and have helped to bring the people of Africa closer to India.

India is not the only country that has embarked on a Summit strategy to strengthen ties with Africa. China, USA, EU, Japan, Turkey and South Korea have successfully pursued Summit diplomacy for the last several years to enhance their partnership with Africa.

The 3rd IAFS is particularly significant as it is the first Summit that is being held after the adoption of Agenda 2063, the Vision Document enacted by Africa for its growth and march to prosperity by *inter alia* promoting rule of law, good governance, gender empowerment, food and energy security and environment from now up to 2063. India has sought to align its proposals for the Summit in accordance with the priorities identified in Agenda 2063.

By all accounts and considering the speed and scale of preparations being made for the visiting dignitaries, the Africa Summit can be expected to be a resounding success, both in terms of providing a wonderful India experience to our eminent guests and also in terms of substantive issues deliberated upon and decisions adopted.

The Summit will provide a platform to a vibrant India and a resurgent Africa to develop a new paradigm of cooperation. 