

PRESS STATEMENT FROM THE OFFICE OF VP ON HIS NEW DELHI VISIT MARCH 14-15, 2016

For two days, 14-15 March 2016, the 11th CII-EXIM Bank Conclave on India-Africa Project Partnership was held in its capital, New Delhi. Among the invited guests of honour was the Vice President of South Sudan, H.E. James Wani Igga. Other guests of honour were Uganda's Premier, Vice Presidents of Nigeria and Ghana. Two guests of honour showed up, South Sudan and Ghana, while the others were represented by senior officials. Almost all other African countries were represented at different levels of seniority.

CII (Confederation of Indian Industry) and EXIM (Export-Import) Bank of India have for the last decade positioned themselves to be the strong arms of India's soft power – i.e. economic power. On one hand, the former is a robust conglomerate of all multinational and national corporations in India which are doing or intend to do business abroad. They include firms that are specialized in construction, agriculture, energy, mineral extraction, capacity building and sector-specific modernization, socioeconomic service provision, etcetera. The later, on the other hand, provide necessary concessional loans to African countries as-well-as documentary credit (or LC) facilitation for those Indian firms that may be suspicious about being paid on time by beneficiary African states.

Another forum that is convened every three years, India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS), is the third component of this relatively new Indian economic outreach towards Africa. Its 2015 summit was dubbed 'a feather in the cap' of Narendra Modi's government because in presence of the highest number of heads of state on Indian soil (41 African presidents and premiers) it promised \$10 billion concessional loans to eligible African states over the coming five years. Even though it would be discreditable for a whole rich continent like Africa to celebrate prospective receipt of that amount, the fact remains that if the amount is injected into the right economic sectors it could go a long way into supplementing much needed service delivery schemes in the continent.

In coordination with India's Ministry of External Affairs, CII-EXIM Bank will mainly use that amount to further India's foreign policy in their country and sector selections of project partnerships. In that regard, unless a country is in India's good books it may not be selected for the developmental assistance courtesy of the programme. Hence, much as it sounds to be a pure public-private partnership forum, its political nature an underlying force beneath its business outlook. Almost certainly, all decisions behind contract awards and concessional loans are going to be taken at the level of India's cabinet with strong recommendations from the country's Ministry of External Affairs.

While the conclave (conference) is held annually as a multilateral forum and the \$10 billion is promised to the continent at large, the fact remains that Africa is made up of 54 countries with each having peculiar investment opportunities and needs. As such, each country is responsible to its success or failure in making use of this offer to get some vital projects done. Each country shall have to provide comprehensive data on its geological information and investment climate that could match India's preference criteria.

South Sudan's high-level delegation to New Delhi reflected the country's acknowledgment of such developmental windows of opportunity. In addition to two elaborate statements by VP Igga during the opening and closing days, the other senior delegates (Presidential Advisor on Economic Affairs- Hon. Agrey Tisa; Minister of Finance- Hon. Deng Athorbei; D/Governor of Bank of South Sudan-Mr. John Dhor, and Economic expert-Dr. Kenyi Spencer) presented impressive statements and elaborate pictures about South Sudan's investment climate. For instance, at one of many side meetings in the margins of the conclave, which brought together all Indian firms doing business in South Sudan, VP and the delegates made very

eloquent and convincing presentations as to why the country should be a major beneficiary of more Indian investment.

Now the ball is on South Sudan's courtyard to make sure that a follow-up body is tasked with coordinating with the Embassy in New Delhi and directly through Foreign Affairs about project proposals. In that regard, there is a saying that: in order to mold iron, it is hit when it is hot. Since India decided to extend invitation to our VP to be a guest of honour at the 11th conclave (conference), it would be imprudent on our side to treat this gesture of good will in the same 'business-as-usual' demeanor we have grown accustomed to. The honour accorded to the country in the person of its VP is a positive indicator that South Sudan is in India's good books and could probably benefit from the \$10 billion concessional loans if it presents an elaborate project which has an embedded multiplier effects. For example, such could be financing construction of a hydroelectric dam or construction of a standard gauge railway from Juba to Bentiu, Malakal, or Rumbek.

What could be in the country's advantage in that 'hitting the iron when it's hot' proposition is the fact that India's Premier, Narendra Modi, has emerged as a proponent of rural development. To some extent, his radical policies of modernizing agriculture, energy security and clean water to rural India is regarded as revolutionary as Indira Gandhi's socialist outlook of the 70s. As far as our slogan of 'taking towns to the village' is concerned, Premier Modi could be the right person at the right time for South Sudan. His government's invitation is a big window of opportunity to present our own rural development project which we could link to CII-EXIM Bank India-Africa outreach.

For much too long, we have always fallen short of taking full advantage of such windows of opportunity when they presented themselves. A handy example in regard to our trip to New Delhi was a conspicuous absence of South Sudan at the exhibition hall, where many African countries were allotted small tables to showcase their investment potentialities in form of three or four-page brochures. While we visited the exhibition hall, we passed by mini kiosks which were setup by Guinea, DRC, Angola, Malawi, and other countries, yet the guest-of-honor country was nowhere to be seen.

It is tempting to go on and on in elaborating about what we could harvest from this new Southern Hemispheric economic cooperation which involves India's aggressive inroads into African economies. Yet, the message is clear that we cannot continue to miss such opportunities to provide services to our impoverished people. Good, actually excellent presentations were made by VP and all the members of his delegation; yet that could evaporate in thin air like China desk promises which have not lived up to any of its enormous hopes. India has already extended its open hand to us, let's just shake it.

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