

**Speech by The Hon'ble President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee at the banquet in honour of The President of The Republic of Burundi, H.E. Mr. Pierre Nkurunziza**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi : 18.09.2012

Your Excellency President Pierre Nkurunziza

And Madame Denise Bucumi Nkurunziza

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you and the distinguished members of your delegation on your first State visit to India.

India values its friendship with Burundi. Your visit to India is an occasion for our Governments to meet at the highest level and take up initiatives that will bring our people closer together in mutually beneficial programmes and partnerships. It is an opportunity to lay the foundations of a comprehensive co-operation, for sharing resources and expertise, building capacities where you would seek it and reviewing all aspects of our trade and investment potential.

Since the opening of your Embassy in New Delhi in 2009, there has been a significant expansion of our bilateral agenda. We look forward to working together with you towards realising its full potential. The Joint Declaration that has been issued today outlines the future course of our partnership.

We appreciate your fruitful efforts that have brought peace and stability to your people. We are confident that in your drive against poverty and underdevelopment you will accomplish the goals that you seek. India stands ready and willing to join hands with the people of Burundi in pursuing their aspirations for development and growth.

There is great potential to further strengthen bilateral trade and investment between our two countries. New areas of economic co-operation and investment are opening up. These need to be pursued systematically to the mutual benefit of our peoples.

India's developmental experience, particularly in energy, agriculture, infrastructure, minerals and in the development of small scale industries and capacity building are ideally suited to generate employment for the youth. We believe that this could be of relevance to Burundi's socio-economic development.

The Kabu hydro electric project, similarly, is a symbol of our commitment to assist you in capacity building and infrastructure development in Burundi. I am pleased that bilateral agreements signed today relate to many of these key sectors - including rural development, health and medicine. The Indian community in Burundi, though small, is already involved in many of these sectors.

This is a critical period of your transit from political emancipation to economic development. It coincides with India's own recalibration and re-vitalisation of its policies towards Africa. We have recently organized two India - Africa Forum Summits, in 2008 and 2011. At these Summits, Government of India has announced several projects in response to specific requirements for accomplishing Africa's urgent aspirations. These summits have provided a matrix for enhancing India's relations with African nations including Burundi. Your leadership at the Second Africa-India Forum Summit held in Addis Ababa in May last year as Head of the East African Community was instrumental in its substantive outcome.

India is glad to know that the Pan-African e-network project has been found useful by Burundi. We have been happy to assist with training programmes and scholarship schemes for undergraduate and post-graduate studies in agriculture, science and scientific research. We are willing to do more - wherever you require it. I understand that we have further increased the number of scholarships for students from Burundi and agreed to establish educational institutions for capacity building.

We acknowledge the growing role of your country in the regional affairs of Africa. Burundi has been actively engaged in achieving peace and stability in Somalia. Your contribution to peace-keeping in Darfur, in Chad and in the Central African Republic has been generous. We are keen to further develop our engagement with the EAC.

India and Burundi have been working together in various international fora including the United Nations and Non-Aligned Movement. We share a common commitment to pluralism, inclusiveness and creation of an equitable world order. We are confident that you will support our endeavours in the reform of the UN. We welcome your support for our candidature for permanent membership of an expanded UN Security Council.

I have no doubt that our bilateral cooperation in the new areas that have been identified during your present visit will bind us even further in an enduring partnership.

I wish you every success in your current initiatives and future endeavours for the people of Burundi.

With these words, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen may I request you to join me in raising a toast:-

- to the health, happiness and well-being of His Excellency President Pierre Nkurunziza and Madame Bucumi Nkurunziza;

- to the well-being and prosperity of the people of Burundi; and

- to lasting friendship between India and Burundi.

