

India in Africa

India Committed to Assist the Global Research in Fight against Ebola

India has indicated that it is committed to cooperate with the international community in research and development of a vaccine to cure Ebola (a deadly viral disease), assuring its help to the ongoing global endeavours to manage the threat.

India's permanent representative to the UN Ambassador, Asoke Mukerji, conveyed to the UN General Assembly on Ebola crisis that the Indian Government has put in place several measures to deal with the possible threat within the country and has also activated relevant national disaster response mechanisms to maintain 'high alert'.

Highlighting India's track record of participating actively in multilateral efforts to tackle public health emergencies in the past, Mukerji has pointed out that India had provided immediate financial assistance to three of the affected countries; Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea for the purchase of medical supplies.

It has also offered half a million dollars to the World Health Organisation (WHO) to assist in the efforts of the international community to deal with the dire health challenge.

"We believe that the international community must support research and development of a vaccine to cure Ebola, which must be made available, especially to the poorest of the poor at realistic prices and India is committed to cooperate to this end. Today, in this hour of need, we stand ready to contribute to the ongoing efforts of the international community to manage this global threat", added Mukerji.



India has also contributed US\$10mn to the UN Chief's Fund for Ebola and an additional two million US\$ for acquisition of protective gear to tackle the deadly disease. In the fact sheet released by the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, India is among the top five contributors to the UN Ebola response with a contribution of US\$12.5mn.

Mukerji noted India's historic ties with the African people and its extensive trade and cultural linkages. Also, a large number of Indians live in the African continent, including over 45,000 Indians residing in the affected region.

Briefing the General Assembly on the situation on the ground, the head of the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response, (UNMEER) Anthony Banbury, said that the crisis caused by the outbreak is severe and unprecedented. He also mentioned that UNMEER alone cannot fight the battle against Ebola.

"To achieve results fast, we must have the world's support", Banbury said, calling for strengthened treatment centres and diagnostic laboratories for the general public scaled up financial support for aid agencies, and reliable arrangements in place to treat and if necessary evacuate the workers treating the disease.

Deputy Secretary-General, Jan Eliasson, said that the Ebola outbreak was putting "hard-won development progress in jeopardy, neighbours are at risk and none of us are insulated from the threat posed by Ebola".

The UN acquires over 80 staff but many more will be needed to reach those areas where support is needed, especially at the local level. He added that the closing borders or imposing travel bans will not isolate the disease but will prevent urgent aid from reaching those in need in state.

"Hospitals are overburdened and people are even worried to go to the hospitals. So you can imagine the number of people that are suffering and that are dying from other diseases – malaria, tuberculosis, all the things that you would normally treat", Eliasson added.

The President of the General Assembly, Sam Kutesa, said that despite the heroic efforts of the doctors and nurses, the epidemic continues to ravage communities with the death toll rising with each passing day.

Ebola is not an African disease. This is a virus that is a threat to all humanity.

– Gayle Smith, Senior Director Development and Democracy, US National Security Council

Power of an Idea

Ten years ago, an idea was proposed to link Indian technology with African countries. The Pan-African e-network at present encompasses 48 African nations and has emerged as a symbol of innovation and development-driven partnership between India and the African continent.

Built at a cost of \$125mn, the e-network provides tele-education and tele-medicine services to the African countries. Under the tele-education component of the network, more than 2000 students from Africa have been enrolled in five different top ranking universities in India in a host of disciplines in various post-graduate, bachelor and diploma courses.

Hailed as a "shining symbol of South-South cooperation", the project has garnered many accolades, including the prestigious Hermes Prize for innovation in the field of sustainable development in 2010. (www.mea.gov.in, 17.08.14)



Support on Food Security

India has been seeking the cooperation of African countries to push for a pact on food security at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The Commerce Secretary, Rajiv Kher reached out to the representatives of Regional Economic Communities in Africa visiting India.

He said that there were 21 countries in the world including eight African countries, using public stockholding for food security purposes that could get affected by the existing rules on subsidies.

India had asked the WTO to amend the norms for calculating agri subsidies in order to procure foodgrains from farmers at minimum support price and sell that to the poor at cheaper rates without attracting any penalty in the WTO. The current WTO norms limit the value of food subsidies at 10 percent of the total value of food grain production.

(www.articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com, 20.08.14)

Trade Preference Benefits

India has opened an opportunity for African products to enjoy special trade preferences. This was revealed at the First Partnership Platform Meeting to start a Project: Supporting India's Trade Preferences for Africa (SITA), Nairobi, in July 9-11, 2014.

The SITA project's core objective is to position India as a partner to improve the productive and export capacities of: Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania.

The SITA project agreement was signed between India, Department for International Development of UK

(DFID), International Trade Centre of the UN (ITC), Exim Bank of India and the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII). The countries selected were on the basis of existing and long trade relations with India.

(www.chamberuganda.com, 30.09.14)

Ethiopia Invites Indian Banks' Help

Ethiopia has been seeking the Indian banking system to engage with its financial sector despite its banking sector being off limits to foreign banks. The Ethiopian Government has requested the State Bank of India (SBI) to open a representative office and engage with the country's financial sector.

"Previously the Ethiopian Government tried to support (investment funds) by availing investment finance with 70:30 ratio – 70 percent loan and 30 percent equity", said Ethiopia's Minister for Industry, Ahmed Abetew. According to him, the purpose of the representative office is to help assist private investors with feasible project ideas by appraising their projects. SBI is India's largest public sector bank and its five subsidiaries control almost 23 percent of the subcontinent's banking sector.

(www.indiabusiness.nic.in, 18.07.14)

3rd India-Africa Summit Postponed

The Ebola outbreak in West Africa has forced India to postpone plans for a 3rd India-Africa Forum Summit to be held in New Delhi in December 2014. This will be attended by representatives of more than 50 African nations, informed the Foreign Ministry spokesman, Syed Akbaruddin.

India had been expecting nearly 1,000 delegates comprising ministers, government officials and business leaders from 50 African nations for the meeting on December 04, expected to be one of the biggest international events in the country.

Akbaruddin informed that the public health guidelines made the management of Third India-Africa Forum Summit logistically difficult. The Government will work with the African Union (AU) on re-scheduling the trade-focused Summit for 2015.

(www.channelnewsasia.com, 21.09.14)

Scope for South African Cos

The Indian High Commissioner to South Africa, Virendra Gupta, said "South African business sector, globally renowned for competencies in infrastructure, financial and insurance sectors should take advantage of the new Indian Government's reform agenda".

Gupta while inaugurating a business seminar titled 'Leveraging Business Opportunities in-post-election India', organised by the Indian Missions in Pretoria and Johannesburg in partnership with the CII. He said that the India-Southern African Customs Union (SACU) Preferential Trade Agreement would be concluded soon to give a boost to bilateral business ties.

The seminar was part of a series of events in the Festival of India 2014 in South Africa currently underway to mark 20 years of India-South Africa diplomatic relations and 20 years of democracy in South Africa.

(www.thehindubusinessline.com, 27.08.14)