

**Address by High Commissioner of India Mr. A.R. Ghanashyam
on the Occasion of the 66th Republic Day of India Celebrations
at the High Commission of India,
Abuja
(January 26, 2015)**

Excellencies Distinguished Justices of the Supreme Court of Nigeria,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, High Commissioners, distinguished senior officials of
the Federal Republic of Nigeria and friends
All protocols observed.

I most gratefully welcome all of you to the celebration of the 66th Republic Day of India at the Indian High Commission in Abuja. I am happy to state that this is the first National Day in the new building of the Indian High Commission in Abuja and I express my gratitude to the government of Nigeria for allotting this beautiful parcel of land to us.

2. This is the day on which Mahatma Gandhi declared the independence of India in 1930, 27 years before India was returned to Indians. After we raised our tricolor national flag on August 15, 1947 the Constituent Assembly of India comprising some of the most highly qualified and experienced Indian leaders of that time sat down to draw up our Constitution and after two and a half years of discussion and debate gave India its Constitution – the holy book of Indian governance. We became the Republic of India on January 26, 2015.

3. On behalf of Government and people of India and my colleagues in the High Commission of India in Abuja and in our Lagos Office permit me, Excellencies and Friends, to also take this opportunity to wish all of you and the Nation of Nigeria a happy, progressive and constructive 2015 and an efficient and peaceful General elections next month.

4. Some of you may have seen in the news today that India celebrated its 66th Republic Day in New Delhi with a distinguished visitor from the United States of America. I would like to remind this august audience that this great honour was extended to Nigeria 16 years ago when then President of Nigeria His Excellency General Olusegun Obasanjo visited India as the Chief Guest of Honour at our 50th Republic Day on January 26, 1999.

5. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, Nigeria has had an excellent 2014 in some respects but also extremely difficult in others. Terrorism has continued in the north east. The brutal blood-letting and mindless mayhem is unacceptable and unpardonable and must end. India supports all efforts of Nigeria in ending this scourge in which innocent women and children are the most unfortunate casualties. The deadly EBOLA virus attacked Nigeria last year but the meticulous manner in which it was addressed, contained and gotten rid off is a commendable achievement even for technologically far more advanced countries in the world. India commends Nigeria on this outstanding work.

6. Since the third quarter of 2014, we have seen a rapid downward slide in the price of oil. Heavily dependent on oil for its revenue, Nigeria will be one of the worst affected economies. We in India believe that Nigeria has the intellectual wisdom and innovative capacity to convert this threat into an opportunity. India remains ready to work with Nigeria in this endeavor of converting a threat into an opportunity.

7. After rebasing its economy in April last year, Nigeria has become the 26th largest economy in the world and the largest in Africa. India's leadership sees Nigeria in yet another light. It is more than just another country among 54 with just 3% land in the huge continent spread over almost 31 million square kilometers. It is a quarter of the wealth of Africa in terms of GDP and a fifth of the demography of the continent in terms of population. We are 1.2 billion people in India and more than two thirds of our population is less than 35 years old. Nigeria is 170 million people and more than half of them are less than twenty years old. We both speak English and the opportunities for mutual benefit can be amazing if Nigeria can dovetail its demographic wealth to India's innovative capabilities.

8. Indians came to Nigeria long ago as shop keepers and school teachers and doctors and paramedics. The composition has changed over the years and decades. Now we have engineers, software professionals, Bankers, CEOs and owners and promoters of industries. In addition to Health and Education, we have added more domains in which India is active in Nigeria. Today, we make steel here, we formulate medicines here, we are building power plants and laying transmission lines in the country, we are milling rice and assembling automobiles, so on and so forth. Last week an Indian company Ranbaxy introduced its latest curative drug for Malaria in different cities of Nigeria.

9. We in India believe that India and Nigeria need each other at this moment to work together in areas relating to (i) Power, (ii) Agriculture, (iii) Micro, Small and Medium Industries and (iv) Innovation. These are powerful sectors that have the potential to drastically reduce Nigerian economy's over reliance on Oil.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion may I raise a toast to our relations with Nigeria..

Long live India – Nigeria cooperation and Long live India –Nigeria friendship.

Jai Hind