

India turns focus to Africa amid deep Chinese presence

Plans 18 more missions to the existing 27 in the continent

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With India continuing to expand its engagement with Africa, a continent where China has already made deep inroads, New Delhi announced plans to set up a mission in Equatorial Guinea, the fourth largest supplier of natural gas to India.

Marking a new phase in the bilateral relations, Ambassador Manuel Mbela Bama Ndong hosted a first reception since the country on the West-Central coast set up its embassy here. Besides members of diplomatic corps, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs Vijay Thakur Singh was present on the occasion to convey greetings on the 50th anniversary of its independence. He said: "I am proud to say that India has been one of the countries that are with you."

India's exports to Equatorial Guinea include food products, cereals, meat, pharma-



Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu being received by his Zimbabwe counterpart Kembo Mohadi, on his arrival, in Harare. PTI

ceuticals, machinery, and apparel while it imports oil and gas, timber with opportunities existing in the form of processing of coconut, cocoa, coffee, rubber, palm, groundnut oil and others. The bilateral trade during 2016-17 stood at \$810 million with the balance of trade heavily in favour of the African country.

Celebrating the 50th year of

his country's independence, Ambassador Ndong on Friday said relations between Equatorial Guinea and India were being strengthened day by day with cooperation in multiple sectors ranging from telecommunications to agriculture.

The Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, he said, was using resources from hydrocarbons

to invest in infrastructure and human resources to expand agriculture, fishing, air transport, education, telecommunications and tourism industries, welcoming foreign investors.

Ever since India hosted the Africa Summit in 2015, New Delhi has sharply increased its interaction with African countries with the President, Vice-President and the Prime Minister travelling to some 27 countries in the continent.

President Ram Nath Kovind paid a visit to Equatorial Guinea this year and was conferred with the country's highest civilian award. This was preceded by the visit of Equatorial Guinea President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo who took part in the first International Solar Alliance Summit in March this year.

In addition, India is planning to open missions in the next five years by adding at least 18 to existing 27 embassies/high commissions in the continent.