

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE RECEPTION FOR INDIAN COMMUNITY AND FRIENDS OF
INDIA IN DHAKA**

Dhaka, December 17, 2021

I convey my hearty greetings to you all!

I am delighted to be here in Dhaka today in this historic 50th year of India-Bangladesh friendship. Along with the pleasure and honour of visiting a close neighbour, I am deeply touched by the warmth and affection of the people of Bangladesh.

Just before meeting you, I went to the historic Ramna Kaali temple where I had the privilege of inaugurating the renovated temple. I look at it as a blessing from Maa Kaali. I have been told that the governments and people of Bangladesh and India helped in restoring the temple which was demolished by Pakistani forces during the war of liberation. A large number of people were killed by the occupation forces. This temple is a symbol of the spiritual and cultural bonding among the people of India and Bangladesh. This marked an auspicious finale to my visit to Bangladesh.

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic last year, this is my first visit abroad. I consider it most appropriate that this first visit of mine is to Bangladesh, during this very special year, as we jointly celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Liberation of Bangladesh and establishment of our diplomatic ties. I pay tribute to the enormous sacrifices made by the people of Bangladesh to achieve freedom from tyranny. We salute your indomitable courage in fighting against the formidable odds, and standing up against injustice. And I also pay homage to the sacrifices of your friends from India and the Indian Armed Forces, who laid down their lives in support of a righteous cause.

Bangladesh has a special place in the heart of Indians. Ours is a uniquely close relationship based on age-old ties of kinship, shared language and culture. Our ties have been nurtured by the sagacious leadership of the two countries. While paying homage to Bangabandhu at his home in 32 Dhanmondi, I was reminded of the declaration of independence that Bangabandhu had issued in Dhaka on 26 March 1971, the atrocities and genocide faced by the people of Bangladesh and the armed struggle of the Mukti Bahini against the brutal Pakistani occupation forces. I pay my respect to the tens of thousands of women whose dignity was violated, and the helpless civilians who were tortured and executed for no fault except their desire to live an honourable life. Today, as your country becomes a model of growth and development in the region, it has proven to the world that the fight of the people of Bangladesh was for a just cause. This fight was for fundamental democratic rights and that the emergence of Bangladesh was indeed the power of right defeating the power of might.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Following the Liberation War, Bangladesh has undergone major socio-economic transformation, especially under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. India has also witnessed commendable growth. The economic and social linkages that have been forged between the people of our two nations have also contributed to this shared story of growth and development.

I am glad that the leadership in both countries is cognizant that our growth trajectories are interlinked and that sharing of resources and experiences is the mantra for sustainable development. The two Governments have also ensured that the fundamentals of our economies remain strong and robust. I am glad to note that our two sides have also made strong commitments to make our growth inclusive, sustainable and environment-friendly. I see huge potential in strengthening the cooperation further in the areas of green energy and clean technology.

As a country that also shares land borders with Bhutan and Nepal, India is conscious of the fact that a well-connected and better integrated sub region is important for achieving a better standard of living for our people, and meeting their growth and developmental aspirations. In this spirit, India remains committed to assisting Bangladesh in its journey towards a strong economy, partnering with you as you proceed to greater prosperity. I also urge our business communities on both sides to seize this opportunity to enhance our trade and economic linkages to new heights especially between Bangladesh and our North Eastern Region.

We are fortunate to be young nations, blessed with energetic and creative populations. Our youth is our biggest resource. We must harness this demographic dividend to ensure it contributes to nation building. I am happy to note that focus is being given on youth exchanges and capacity building initiatives. This will help in building skills needed to succeed in this globalised world.

I also congratulate all Indian citizens present here today. You all have made a mark in various sectors of importance in Bangladesh. While you have contributed to the economic and social development of Bangladesh, you have also cemented our long-standing, close bilateral relations. You are making India proud by bringing prosperity to our region. While doing so, you have also followed the values and traditions of our country, which are also part of our shared heritage with Bangladesh.

Maintaining Bangladesh's foundational values of a progressive, inclusive, democratic and harmonious society has been one of the major contributions of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. As I assured His Excellency the President, and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, India will stand in support of a Bangladesh that embodies the values, that emerge from the Liberation Movement of this country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

You are aware that safety, security, welfare, and well-being of Indian citizens in all parts of the world is a priority for our Government. In every

corner of the world, over the last one and a half years, the Government made special efforts to enable our citizens to return home during the worst phase of the Covid-19 pandemic. Our Government will continue to take all necessary steps to strengthen our links with our citizens abroad, as well as with our diaspora. I am pleased to note that the Indian High Commission in Dhaka was at the forefront of our 'Vande Bharat Mission' and other welfare activities for Indian citizens in distress. As we celebrate 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' in India, I urge our citizens here to come forward and contribute in their own way to the cause of nation building.

To our friends in Bangladesh, let me assure you again that India values your extraordinary goodwill and friendship. We look forward to remaining closely connected, to jointly achieving development and prosperity, and to meeting the aspirations of our people.

In this unique year, when we are celebrating the Golden Jubilee of the Liberation War, the birth centenary of Bangabandhu and the 50th anniversary of our friendship as well as the 75th anniversary of India's independence, let us rededicate ourselves towards fulfilling the dreams of the founding fathers of our nations. I am confident that the bond forged by blood and sacrifice in 1971 will continue to bind our nations together in future. I wish you all success and good health in these difficult pandemic times.

Thank you and best wishes!