

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS,
ASHGABAT**

Ashgabat, April 3, 2022

It is my pleasure to interact with young students of the prestigious Institute of International Relations under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan - an Institute established by the visionary leader His Excellency Mr. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to train Turkmen diplomats.

Just as in your case, the Institute of Foreign Service – now known as Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service – was established in New Delhi more than 35 years ago to cater to the professional training needs of the Indian Foreign Service officers. The scope of the Institute has been expanded over the years. Today it also offers various Mid-Career Training Programmes for Heads of Mission, Commercial Representatives and Defence Attaches. I am pleased to note that about 30 Turkmen diplomats have so far undergone Professional Courses at this Institute.

Dear Friends,

Turkmenistan today has managed to carve out a special niche in international relations with the principle of 'permanent neutrality'. The five concepts – ensuring peace and security, promoting neutrality, diversifying economic relations, promoting social development and humanization of international relations – endeavour to secure a prosperous future for the country and the region.

India and Turkmenistan are ancient civilizations but young nations. Last year, your country celebrated the 30th anniversary of

independence while the people of India are celebrating 75 years of our independence this year. The renowned Turkmen poet Magtymguly Pyragy said, "If God gets wings, he will fly to India." India is the birthplace of at least four major religions, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Over 200 million Muslims proudly call India their home. India's receptiveness to other cultures has been its hallmark while unity in diversity remains its inherent strength.

Dear Friends,

One of the key pillars of India's foreign policy in recent years has been the "Neighbourhood First" policy. The overarching philosophy of India's engagement with its neighbours is to ensure that they also benefit from our economic development and growth. Thus, the focus of our Neighbourhood First policy is to enhance connectivity, augment trade and investment, and build a secure and stable neighbourhood.

While 'Indo-Pacific' is a recent addition to the geopolitical lexicon, India's engagement with the Indo-Pacific region goes back several centuries. The dynamism and vitality of the region makes it a global economic centre. We stand for an open, balanced, rules-based and stable international trade regime in the Indo-Pacific. Our approach is based on cooperation and collaboration. This was elaborated through the vision of SAGAR, which means "Ocean" in several Indian languages – and stands for Security and Growth for All in the Region. SAGAR guides our approach towards both the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific regions.

India's foreign policy has been constantly evolving since its independence. India's emergence as one of the major economies of the world and the relevance of India's technological capabilities has shaped key global negotiations. India's partnerships with countries of the Global South has grown substantially while its relations with major powers have deepened further. Both India and United States have partnered with Japan and Australia in the "Quad" arrangement

for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. With Russia, India enjoys a 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership'.

Dear Friends,

One of the focus areas of Indian foreign policy in the last few years has been the revitalization of our historical ties with the Central Asian countries, which are a part of our 'extended neighbourhood'. As developing countries, India and Central Asian countries share common perspectives and similar approaches. We face common challenges such as terrorism, extremism, radicalization, drug trafficking etc. India has also strategic relations with most of the Central Asian countries. In January this year, the Leaders of India and Central Asia took part in a historic 'India-Central Asia Summit' with a view to take our partnership to newer heights. The institutionalization of this Summit mechanism has added a new chapter in our partnership.

Connectivity with the Central Asian countries remains a key priority for India. India is a member of both the International North-South Transport Corridor, and the Ashgabat agreement. We have taken steps to operationalize the Chabahar port in Iran which can provide a secure, viable and unhindered access to the sea for the Central Asian countries. While expanding connectivity, it is important to ensure that connectivity initiatives are consultative, transparent and participatory, with respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries. India stands ready to cooperate, invest and build connectivity in the region.

As immediate neighbours of Afghanistan, our countries are naturally concerned about developments in that country. We strongly support a peaceful, secure and stable Afghanistan and emphasize its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. We share a broad 'regional consensus' on the issues related to Afghanistan, which includes the formation of a truly representative and inclusive government, combating terrorism and drug trafficking, central role of the UN, providing immediate humanitarian assistance for the people

of Afghanistan and preserving the rights of women, children and other national ethnic groups and minorities in Afghanistan.

India's position on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has been steadfast and consistent. We have emphasized that the current global order is anchored in international law, UN Charter, and respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty of states. We are deeply concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation. We have called for immediate cessation of violence and hostilities and return to the path of dialogue and diplomacy. We have also provided humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.

The United Nations, which was founded more than 76 years ago, remains the most universal and representative international organization. At the core of India's call for reformed multilateralism lies the reform of the UN Security Council, to reflect the contemporary realities. In this context, India values the support of Turkmenistan for our permanent membership in a reformed and expanded UN Security Council. During our ongoing non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council, India has prioritized development, fight against terrorism, reform of the multilateral system, international peace and security, and technology with a human touch.

Dear Friends,

I am delighted to know about the appreciation of Indian culture in Turkmenistan, especially Indian films, TV serials, music and dance. I am told that Indian actors and actresses from several generations are household names here. It is heartening to learn that Indian dance and songs are performed at important events. Following the establishment of Central Asia's first Yoga and Traditional Medicine Centre in Ashgabat in July 2015, Yoga and Ayurveda have also captured the imagination of the people here. All these are shining examples of the rich cultural linkages between our two countries.

It will be my pleasure to inaugurate an 'India Corner' at the Institute of International Relations immediately after this programme. The 'India Corner' is envisioned to create interest in India amongst the students of the Institute in organizing India related activities. The Government of India has provided computers, books on India and musical instruments and other materials to equip the 'India Corner'.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the world witnesses a revolution in new and emerging technologies with the growing role of social media, diplomats are expected to be flexible and adaptable. I hope that the training received at this Institute would help you to adapt to the emerging trends and to master the intricate skills of modern diplomacy. I am sure that some of you may also get an opportunity to represent your nation in India.

As Turkmenistan marches ahead in the 'Era of people with Arkadag', India, as a longstanding friend, stands ready to partner with it to realize the collective dreams of our people. I sincerely hope that my visit to Turkmenistan will impart a new momentum to further promote partnership between the two countries. I wish you all good health and success in your future endeavours.

Thank you.

Sag bol!