

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SMT. DROUPADI MURMU AT THE BANQUET HOSTED BY PRESIDENT
OF TIMOR-LESTE JOSÉ RAMOS-HORTA**

Dili, August 10, 2024

I am honoured to be standing before you today. On behalf of the Government and the people of India, please accept my warm greetings.

First and foremost, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our gracious hosts in Timor-Leste for the generous hospitality extended to me and my delegation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I had fruitful meetings with Excellency President Horta and Prime Minister Gusmão today. Given the useful discussions we had, I am confident that the strength of our bilateral relations will only grow stronger.

I also addressed the small but vibrant Indian community here. It is heartening to see that the Indian community has made a mark for themselves in Timor-Leste where they are now valued members. I am proud to note that people from my country are closely associated with the development journey of your country.

In my meeting with President Horta, he expressed his fondness for India and mentioned that he has visited India several times. Ladies and Gentlemen, he also happens to be the first Head of State from Timor-Leste to visit India. He led a delegation to the 'Vibrant Gujarat Summit' which was organised in January this year in Gandhinagar, Gujarat and held extensive discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. I believe that such exchanges of high-level visits would further deepen our ties.

Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

India and Timor-Leste are not only bound by historical trade ties and a similar struggle against colonialism, but also a shared commitment to peace and a common aspiration for the future; especially for the countries of the 'Global South'.

I am reminded of what President Horta said during his Nobel Peace Prize speech in 1996, which continues to remain relevant today. I quote:

“Diplomacy and mediation are not prerogatives of the major powers. The small and medium-size countries without ambitions to a neo-imperial role and whose strength is their moral integrity are best placed to open dialogue among the parties in a conflict.”

Today, Timor-Leste is carving out its own destiny. It is considered as one of the vibrant democracies of Southeast Asia and this is a testimony to the courage, resilience and bravery of the Timorese people who have achieved this, despite a rough road to independence.

India was one of the earliest countries to recognise Timor-Leste as an independent country in 2002, and in these 22 years, Timor-Leste has stood as a shining beacon of democracy and pluralism.

At this juncture, I would like to extend my heartiest congratulations to you on the adoption of the 'Roadmap for Timor-Leste's full membership of ASEAN' during the 42nd ASEAN Summit in 2023.

Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

India has made significant strides in various sectors since its independence. From economic growth to space technology, from advancements in healthcare to innovations in renewable energy, India continues to chart a path of progress and development that is inclusive and sustainable.

Our commitment to foster stronger ties with Timor-Leste is reflected in our shared goals of promoting peace, stability, and prosperity. India and Timor-Leste are developmental partners in various fields such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and business.

While our trade figures are modest, we are working towards enhancing our existing cooperation. We are also conducting various capacity-building programs for empowering Timorese youth through skilling in sectors such as Information and Communication Technology, healthcare, agriculture, and fisheries.

Excellency,

I believe that the opening of Resident Missions in both countries will further enhance our ties, thus truly giving the 'Delhi - Dili' connection a boost.

As we look towards the future, India remains committed to partnering with Timor-Leste in its journey towards progress and development. With the commencement of direct flight connectivity from Bali to India, the distance has further reduced. This will help in exploring new avenues of cooperation such as medical tourism.

This evening, we reaffirm our commitment to strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation between our two countries. We will remain committed to build a future that is prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable for our people and for generations to come.

India will continue to be a force for global peace and shared prosperity, in keeping with its ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, and I am confident that Timor-Leste will be a trusted friend and partner in this journey.

Thank you once again, Your Excellency President Horta, for your gracious hospitality and for hosting this memorable evening.

I extend my best wishes for the health and well-being of the friendly people of Timor-Leste.

Thank you!
