

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF INAUGURATION THE ADDITIONAL
BUILDING COMPLEX OF SUPREME COURT**

New Delhi, July 17, 2019

1. I am glad to be here at an event that commemorates two different but in a sense related landmarks for the Supreme Court of India and for the delivery of justice in our country. Today, I am happy to inaugurate the Additional Building Complex of the Supreme Court – a 21st century home for India's apex judicial institution. I am also happy to receive and be introduced to translations of 100 important judgements of the Supreme Court. These will now be available in a variety of regional and Indian languages, and accessible to hundreds of millions of our fellow citizens who may not know English.
2. As a former member of the Supreme Court Bar, I have spent many productive professional years in the Supreme Court. I have very fond memories of its courtrooms, registry, and particularly the Bar Library. The architecture and history of the Supreme Court building have always been a source of fascination. The Supreme Court was the first large-scale public structure built in our capital after Independence. It was also the first major state building to be designed by an Indian architect in what had till only recently been an imperial city.
3. The building was designed with aesthetic care. It merged remarkably with other structures in its neighbourhood, including Rashtrapati Bhavan and Parliament House, part of which was in fact the original location of the Supreme Court. In August 1958, my predecessor and the first President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, inaugurated the Supreme Court building. While the building has expanded since then, it had become obvious for some years now that increasing demands required a whole new complex. Today's inauguration is a

result of those efforts, for which I must congratulate the Supreme Court and the judicial fraternity, as well as the government of India and the agencies responsible.

4. The Additional Building Complex, I am told, will host a registry, a library, conference and seminar halls, and facilitate the storage of records. While the look of the complex is traditional and in keeping with the design integrity of the main Supreme Court building, I am happy to learn that green and energy efficient technology have been put to good use. I understand that state-of-the-art waste and water management mechanisms have been installed, as well as a solar power grid. This is welcome news. I am confident that such initiatives will henceforth be standard practice in all our public construction projects.

Ladies and Gentlemen

5. The Additional Building Complex for the Supreme Court will no doubt lead to greater comfort for judges, lawyers, litigants and others connected with the court and court matters. However, we must appreciate the broader spirit behind it. Much more than physical ease, such infrastructure should provide benefits in enhancing efficiency and speed of adjudication, disposal of cases and delivery of justice. The ultimate test of any expansion of this nature must be in terms of what it brings to ordinary citizens and litigants – and to their quest for justice.
6. The issue of access to justice is also central to the second landmark we are commemorating today – the translation of Supreme Court judgements into multiple regional languages. This is a subject very close to my heart. As a member of the Bar, I have seen common litigants struggle to understand a judgement simply because they don't know English. Often they have to engage a lawyer to explain the judgement to them, incurring extra cost. You will agree that this is very unfair to the affected litigants.

7. For a considerable period, and especially since assuming office as the President of India, I have been advocating the need to provide certified translated copies of high court judgements in the local language of the state or region – as well as translated copies of Supreme Court judgements in Indian languages. At our first meeting after the Chief Justice of India, Justice Ranjan Gogoi, took office in October 2018, I mentioned this to him. To my delight, his response was instant and positive. He told he had been thinking on similar lines. The collection of translated judgements presented to me today is an outcome of his sincere efforts and those of other judges and officials of the Supreme Court.
8. The 100 judgements that have been translated into nine Indian languages represent a start. I am told priority has been given to judgements related to labour laws, consumer protection, family and personal laws, land acquisition and rental disputes, and similar areas – because these concern common people.
9. While this is sound logic, I would urge that the purview and ambition of the project not be limited by utilitarian purposes. Our aim should be to ensure that the maximum number of judgements of the Supreme Court and the high courts should be available in major Indian languages. Ideally this should include judgements on crucial constitutional matters. In the initial period, this will be a boon to litigants – but eventually it will help spread the light of legal learning and understanding of the nuances of law across our country. It will assist in building a legally aware and enlightened society.
10. I recognise that translation can be a long and laborious task. Yet, here technology can come to our assistance. I must appreciate the Supreme Court's open-mindedness in developing and deploying software that translates judgement texts into different languages. I am certain that with time and experience, the software program will only improve and incorporate many more languages. Digital technologies and

Artificial Intelligence often pose tricky questions and challenges for our courts; by deploying them for translation, our judiciary is converting such challenges into opportunities.

11. As I conclude, I must emphasise my optimism that the new beginnings being made today will go a long way in providing speedy justice to our citizens and to those who come to the Supreme Court for a fair process and a fair judgement. The efficiency and responsiveness of the judicial system is dependent on both quality and quantity. While the quality of our judges and the independence of our judiciary are recognised around the world, the problem of numbers and vacancies has arisen from time to time. Even so, today we are in the happy position that all 31 vacancies in the Supreme Court have been filled by able judges. This has happened after a full decade, and for this achievement too I must congratulate the Collegium and the government for working together with such understanding and urgency.

12. With the court at full strength, with a new Building Complex, and with a commendable programme of translating judgements into Indian languages in operation, the Supreme Court is at a very exciting phase in its long and illustrious history. The members of the Bar too have a key responsibility towards the delivery of justice; I am confident that with this new beginning, they will fulfil their mandate with renewed vigour. With those words, I wish the Supreme Court – and I wish all of you, its stakeholders – the very best for the future.

Thank you
Jai Hind!