

## **Address by the Hon'ble President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind at Indian Community and Friends of India Reception**

1. It gives me immense pleasure to start off my State Visit to Bulgaria with a meeting with all of you. I have been touched by the tremendous warmth and affection with which I have been received. This is testimony to the enduring bonds of friendship, history and culture that India and Bulgaria enjoy. I thank you for your warm and colourful welcome.
2. India-Bulgaria friendship is very special. Our links are old and ancient. There are surprising similarities in our cultures, and deep and abiding connections too. You meet a Bulgarian and he would tell you music closest to traditional Bulgarian music is Indian! In India, we are ever grateful for the support your revolutionary Georgi Rakovski gave for our Independence. To honour him, we have a school in Delhi named after him. The great Bulgarian painter Boris Georgiev was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. Our great poet Rabindranath Tagore visited Bulgaria in 1926 and added yet another chapter to our cultural ties.
3. I look forward to meeting President Radev tomorrow to strengthen our bilateral ties. Tomorrow, 5th September, happens to be the birthday of my illustrious scholarly predecessor Dr. S Radhakrishnan. In his honour, this day is celebrated as Teachers Day in India. I am delighted that on this special day, I will be addressing the students at the Sofia University. I also eagerly look forward to unveiling the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in South Park in Sofia. On 2nd October, in less than a month from now, we would be launching our worldwide celebrations of his 150th birthday. I seek your whole-hearted support to illuminate his life and legacy.
4. In this distinguished gathering, we have Indians from various walks of life - professionals, students, scholars and business people. Some of you may have come to this country decades ago, some of you may have arrived only years back. But there is one common thread which binds us all together. This is our common cultural and spiritual heritage. I am happy that you have kept our traditions and festivals alive in this country. But what is truly heart-warming is the way our Bulgarian friends appreciate and embrace our culture and ethos.

Ladies and gentlemen,

5. I know that you closely follow developments in India. We have undertaken a range of transformative policy measures to give a new purpose and clarity of vision for inclusive development and good governance in the country. We have imparted a new energy to our economy. Results are there for all to see. India is the fastest growing major economy in the world with a current growth rate of 8.2%. We are making steady progress towards becoming a 5 trillion economy and the 3rd largest consumer market in the world by 2025. The world's engagement with India is at a new high. According to the latest World Bank and IMF estimates, Indian economy will continue on its high trajectory recording 7.8% growth in 2019. India ranked 3rd in the World Economic Forum's list of most trusted governments in 2017. And we climbed 42 places in the World Bank Ease of Doing Business Index in the last few years. This is India on the march, a nation on the move!
  
6. We have undertaken a number of path breaking economic reforms. The Goods and Services Tax has created a single unified market in India for the first time in its history. India is contributing to and witnessing the onset of a digital technology revolution which is changing the way our government engages its citizens. The Digital India programme is transforming the face of public service delivery in the country. Poverty elimination and shared prosperity for all has become our motto, our mission. To promote entrepreneurship and create jobs under our micro-finance scheme MUDRA we have disbursed 128 million loans worth US Dollars 90 billion. 74% of its beneficiaries are women. We have also set a goal for providing affordable and inclusive healthcare to our citizens. Our ambitious healthcare program, Ayushman Bharat aims to provide health insurance to 500 million people, effectively covering 40% of our population.
  
7. There is new confidence in India today. The youth is brimming with ideas and energy. We are driving innovation, creating jobs and skilling people. And we are leading the world on clean energy pathway and on tackling climate change. Our scientists and innovators are challenging new frontiers, be it our Space Mission to Mars or deploying hydroponic technologies in rural areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. Bulgaria has made rapid strides towards prosperity and both countries can complement each other in their respective growth and progress. Our strongest common asset is our people. Their hard work, commitment, and compassion have been the building blocks of our nations. And they share a magical connection that has endured through the centuries.
9. The Indian Diaspora in Bulgaria constitutes a living bridge between our countries. Your numbers may be small but you have made appreciable contribution to fostering bilateral ties. You are a true reflection of India with its rich diversity, cultural heritage and traditions. We count you as our cultural ambassadors and expect you to spread the beauty and ethos of India far and wide.
10. I express my deep appreciation for the Friends of India in Bulgaria who, through their sheer commitment and love for India, have created an amazing network of cultural and academic institutions, yoga schools and ayurveda centers. I also commend your annual publication SVETILNIK which serves as a torchbearer for all things Indian.
11. The Indology Department of Sofia University has been doing stellar work for the last 35 years in spreading awareness about Indian languages, philosophy, history and culture in this country. I am delighted to learn that its scholars have translated 8 of the principal Upanishads from Sanskrit into Bulgarian this year. I also take this opportunity to congratulate Prof Galina Sokolova of the Department for receiving the World Hindi Award at the recently held World Hindi Conference in Mauritius.

Ladies and gentlemen,

12. There is a new vigour in our Diaspora policy and outreach. We have taken several steps to connect you better with India. We have simplified our OCI scheme to allow more and more persons of Indian origin to connect with the land of their ancestors. We also want your young ones to connect with the youth in India. We run a special programme – the Know India Programme- to bring our diaspora youths together and expose them to India. You must take advantage of it.
13. And not just that. We have also created a new facility- the Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra- in New Delhi as a one stop resource centre

for our diaspora. It is your permanent home in India. Please do visit the centre and see how you can contribute to its growth and development. I also invite you to the Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas to be held in Varanasi from 21st to 23rd January next year.

14. We feel proud of you and your accomplishments. You have done well here, no doubt, but there are immense opportunities waiting for you in India. I urge you, not to limit your connection with India to an emotional one, but take a step forward. India, today, is a land of opportunity for those who want to connect, innovate, trade and invest. We welcome your participation in India's transformative journey. A resurgent India awaits you!

15. It has been my absolute pleasure interacting with you. I wish each one of you and your families the very best. And I invite you to visit Rashtrapati Bhavan whenever you are in India. It may be my official residence, but first and foremost it belongs to you and to the entire nation. May you continue to work for the progress and prosperity of India and Bulgaria.

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