

**Address by the Hon'ble President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind
at the Indian Community Reception in Czech Republic**

1. I thank you for welcoming me with such warmth and affection. I am delighted to meet you. Your presence here speaks of your affection for your country and for the land of your forefathers.
2. I am pleased to learn that the Indian Community in the Czech Republic, though small in number, is making significant contribution to the progress of this country. As professionals, scientists, entrepreneurs and students, you also serve as a living bridge between the two countries. You have flourished in this country and have earned deep respect for yourselves and for India. We are, indeed, proud of your success.
3. This is not just a beautiful country, but a country with a large heart for India and for Indians. We have warm and friendly relations with the Czech Republic. Our ties go back a thousand years when traders from Bohemia bought spices and silk from India. Both our countries have inherited a rich cultural heritage, which has gained vibrancy over the years. The Charles University here is the oldest center of Indology in Europe. Eminent Czech scholars brought the works of Rabindranath Tagore to the Czech people and helped foster a deep cultural connect with India. The installation of the bust of Rabindranath Tagore, in Prague, and naming the tram station "Thakurova" after him, is homage to Gurudev and to his poetic genius.
4. We also have some other very interesting connections with this city and this country. Our great leader Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose visited Prague and spent some time here. In his quest for freedom for his motherland, he founded the Indo-Czech Association in Prague in 1934. And then there is a very special link. Many of you would know that Bata, a brand with

which all Indians have grown up and which all of us consider our own, has its roots in this country. A great son of the Czech Republic, Thomas Bata founded the Bata shoe company in a town not far from Prague. And from here it spread to every nook and corner of the world including Batanagar, close to Kolkata in India. Bata shoes today walk in every village, every town and every city in India.

5. We are keen to strengthen and diversify our relations with the Czech Republic. Tomorrow, I will have discussions with President Zeman, on taking forward our bilateral relations, particularly, our economic ties. There are numerous opportunities for businesses to grow both ways – be it trade, technology or investment. I am accompanied on this visit by a strong business delegation. I do hope you will take out time to meet and guide them on local opportunities and prospects.

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. The dynamism our country and our economic growth has made India a bright star in the international arena. India is the fastest growing major economy in the world, with a current growth rate of 8.2%. We have undertaken ambitious plans to build next-generation infrastructure, including smart cities, airports, high-speed train corridors, highways, and cyber connectivity. The Czech Republic, a manufacturing powerhouse with advanced technology base, can be a key partner for our Make In India, Digital India, Start-up India and other national programmes. We seek your support in this endeavour. Your professional experience, convening power, and entrepreneurial spirit can make this partnership blossom.
7. The argument for India today is compelling. There is a perceptible change in the attitudes of people towards us. You would have experienced it firsthand when traveling. The value of an Indian passport has gone up. At home, there is a new confidence in our people. Young underprivileged children from villages in Maharashtra have dared and climbed the Everest and an all-woman navy team has successfully

circumnavigated the globe. India is changing rapidly, and the world is noticing us:

- India received an unprecedented FDI of more than US dollars 60 billion in 2016-2017
 - On the World Bank Ease of Doing Business ranking, we have improved 42 notches in the last 3 years.
 - We have scaled 32 notches in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index in the last 2 years.
 - On the World Bank Access to Electricity Index, we have jumped 73 places.
8. We are a country with large young population. Our youth have unlimited dreams and expectations. They are driving the digital revolution, powering the start-up ecosystem and pioneering artificial intelligence. With a large pool of skilled human resource, we are preparing ourselves to make the best of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
9. And while we are pushing for growth, we are acutely conscious of our social responsibilities. Our gender empowerment programme - *Beti Bachao and Beti Padhao* - that is Save Girl Child, Educate Girl Child - is yielding significant results. Under the *Ujjwala* scheme, we have distributed clean cooking gas connections to 50 million less privileged families, giving our womenfolk a breather from choking fumes. Our ambitious *Ayushman Bharat* programme aims to provide health benefits to 500 million people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. We consider every Indian abroad as our cultural ambassador. Wherever you go, you must share the beauty of your culture and knowledge with the local people. This year on 2nd October, we will begin our worldwide celebrations of the 150th birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. We expect you to do your best to support our efforts.

11. There is a new vigour in our diaspora outreach today. We have made our OCI scheme flexible so that more and more people can avail them. We want to connect and collaborate with every Indian abroad, and provide them a helping hand when in need. We have deployed social media and digital platforms to render efficient consular services. Our Embassies abroad are available round the clock for servicing those in need. In the last few years, we have rescued 90,000 Indians from violence and disaster hit areas abroad. This also included citizens from 50 other countries. As a result of our commitment and action, every Indian abroad today feels assured and is confident that the government is there to protect and help them when in need. We will be celebrating the Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas in Varanasi from 21st to 23rd January next year. I do hope you will join us.

12. We are determined to move forward to make India a truly developed country and to see that India earns its rightful place in the world order. I hope that the Indian community in the Czech Republic, will do its utmost, to strengthen the cultural and economic ties between the two countries.

13. We want you to join our journey towards growth and prosperity. The 21st century is being called the Asian century. And India will certainly have an important role in it. Wherever you may be living, you will feel the impact of this role, you will feel the impact of rising India.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. I once again express my deep appreciation for your accomplishments and your presence here this evening. 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. I also thank the people of the Czech Republic, who have hosted you with such respect and dignity.

Thank you!

AKT/VJ/SBP