

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE RECEPTION HOSTED BY THE AMBASSADOR OF INDIA

Minsk, Belarus : 03.06.2015

Hon'ble Prime Minister of Belarus, His Excellency Mr. Andrey Vladimirovich Kobyakov,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be in Belarus.

I am particularly honoured to be the first Head of State from India to visit this beautiful country. Since I arrived, I have had the privilege to interact with the leading personalities of Belarus in politics, academia, science and technology, industry, culture and sports. I have had very good discussions earlier today with His Excellency the President of Belarus. My interaction with Your Excellency, Mr. Prime Minister and the other leaders that I have met during my visit, have strengthened my conviction that the traditionally warm ties of friendship and co-operation between India and Belarus will intensify and strengthen in the days to come.

Excellency, distinguished guests,

India attaches great value to our friendship and co-operation with Belarus. Our common interests in the field of science and technology, our complementarities in the fields of information technology and engineering, our collaboration in energy and in pharmaceuticals - as well as our close cooperation in defence, have linked our countries in a long standing, fruitful partnership for mutual benefit.

Even as we deepen our collaboration in these areas, we continue to explore new avenues in several areas of common interest – prioritising renewable energy, manufacturing, mining and vocational training.

Excellency,

As you are aware, India is an old civilization with a young population. 65% of our population is presently below the age of 35 years. For investors and business partners, we are a fast growing economy and expanding market and, for tourists and academicians ours is a fascinating land of ancient culture and incredible regional diversities. Government of India is taking a number of initiatives to channelise our significant resources towards inclusive growth of all constituents of our economy and society – by encouraging investment, reviving the manufacturing sector, promoting skill development, developing smart cities and improving sanitation and cleanliness - especially of our rivers. We hope to see substantial involvement by all our partners and friends in India and abroad to translate these goals into reality. Belarus has competencies in many of these

areas, especially in construction machinery, urban development, vocational training and niche areas of manufacturing and technology. I would emphasise that this is an opportune moment - Indian companies are also keen to partner with Belarus in these sectors.

H. E. President Lukashenka and I will be addressing representatives of the business and industrial sectors of both our countries tomorrow and we will take the opportunity to share with them our common vision for the way forward in India – Belarus co-operation.

Another key objective of my visit is to foster mutually beneficial linkages between premier academic and scientific institutions in India and Belarus. I am glad to see that the Indian Digital Learning Centre in Minsk has been successfully operating since January 2012 - and has imparted advanced IT training to a large number of IT professionals from Belarus. Several young people from Belarus have benefited from India's ITEC training programmes. Belarus is popular with Indian students. We must encourage linkages in the education sector as an investment in capacity-building for future generations.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am indeed heartened to note the deep and widespread appreciation of Indian culture and traditions in Belarus. Many in Belarus have trained in classical Indian dance and music. I am glad that after completing their training, they are encouraged to further disseminate what they have learned – to other interested young people of Belarus.

I note that ancient Indian scriptures are an area of considerable interest – and research- by learned academicians of this country. Last but not the least, Indian sportspersons could benefit from deeper cooperation in the area of sports between India and Belarus.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We certainly have much to look forward to in our bilateral partnership. The small Indian community in Belarus, including our students, has been made to feel comfortable, welcome and secure here. For this, I thank the friendly people of Belarus – and call upon the members of the Indian community, as they live and work here, to continue to make a positive contribution by your endeavours. At the same time, I am confident you will play an invaluable role in strengthening the bonds of friendship between India and Belarus.

With these words, I wish to extend to you all - and through you, to the friendly people of Belarus, warm greetings of the people of India and best wishes for your continued happiness, progress and prosperity.

Thank you!