

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE VALEDICTORY ADDRESS AND CONFERMENT OF THE PRAVASI BHARTIYA SAMMAN AT THE 14TH EDITION OF THE PRAVASI BHARTIYA DIVAS

Bengaluru : 09.01.2017

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be present amongst you on the occasion of the valedictory session of the Pravasi Bhartiya Sammelan. On this historic day 102 years ago, the greatest Pravasi Bhartiya of all times Mahatma Gandhi returned to India from South Africa.

2. We gather here today to recalibrate and reaffirm our roots even as we take pride in and gain sustenance from our adopted countries. One of the largest community of expatriates amounting to about 31.7 millions, the Pravasi Bhartiya stands out for his innate ability to assimilate and yet maintain his identity. In doing so, you have contributed immensely to your adopted lands through your dedication and hard work.

3. There are many amongst you who have made notable contributions in the fields of high technology, business, politics, art & culture and sports to mention, a few. On behalf of the Government of India, it was indeed an honour for me to have conferred the Pravasi Bhartiya Samman on 30 members of the Diaspora just a while back. I congratulate each one of you for your contributions to your counties of origin and India.

4. Friends, We are here today to celebrate your successes and achievements. You have been the frontline envoys of Indian culture since long and I hope that you will remain the foremost emissaries of the unfolding Indian story. As a people exposed to the best of western technology and yet having their civilisational moorings in the ageless and eternal ethos of India, you are doubly blessed. The synergy of the west and the east that you represent, provides you with a unique position and opportunity that involves sharing knowledge between your home land and your adopted countries. While you showcase India to your host countries, you also bring along the cultural heritage of your adopted lands to India. To my mind, nothing could exemplify our belief of '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam*' more than this.

6. Many of you having achieved material abundance, are actively involved in the pursuit of higher callings of spiritualism and happiness. For us in India, this has to be a parallel exercise and I am sure that you could play a guiding role in this sphere. As we continue to strive successfully in achieving our due and deserving place amongst the Comity of Nations on economic and strategic indices, our ancient strengths in the realm of the sublime and the subtle should continue to remain in focus.

7. Dear Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Pravasi Bhartiya Divas has been a flagship event for the engagement of the government with the Diaspora spread across the world. I am happy to know that Indian Embassies and High Commissions abroad are celebrating the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas today, with the members of Indian Diaspora in their respective countries.

8. This Convention does not only provide an interface between the government and the Indian Diaspora. It also provides an excellent opportunity for both the Government of India and the State Governments to showcase policies, initiatives and achievements in various sectors and invite the Diaspora to contribute and give back to the country of their origin.

8. Friends, we have amongst us several eminent personalities from the Indian Diaspora who are in leadership positions across the Globe. His Excellency Dr Antonio Costa, the Prime Minister of Portugal who is with us today, has his roots in Goa. His presence here is a source of inspiration for us, and for the Indian Diaspora across the world. We are delighted that he could participate as Chief Guest in the Pravasi Bharatiya Sammelan. India's relations with Portugal have been and continue to stay warm and friendly with close political, security, cultural and most importantly people-to-people ties.

9. I am also glad that one of the youngest Indian Diaspora leaders, the Vice President of Suriname Mr. Michael Ashwin Adhin is here with us today. India enjoys close and friendly relations with Suriname, reinforced by cultural and people to people contact. The Indian Diaspora migrated to Suriname nearly 142 years ago. More than 2,30,000 persons of Indian-origin living in Suriname have made a significant contribution in all walks of life in that country.

10. Distinguished Friends, while we celebrate achievements and successes, I want to draw attention towards several NRI's who are temporary migrants in the Gulf region and South East Asia. They are Indian citizens who migrate for employment as low-skilled and semi-skilled labour. They toil hard day and night, and save to send the fruits of their labour as remittances to India, to maintain their families back home. These remittances are the largest by any Diaspora, at 12% of the total global remittances, amounting to \$69 billion in 2015.

11. Many of them are likely to return to India, but while they live abroad, all of them are vulnerable in many ways owing to the fact that they do not enjoy the privileges of citizenship in their host country. This is especially true of people working in areas of strife and conflict, with their security and physical well being on the line. In this regard, it is with satisfaction that I note the role played by their mother country in assuaging their concerns. In swift and coordinated operations involving multiple Ministries and Organizations, we have been able to bring back thousands of fellow countrymen from strife torn Nations. I congratulate our dynamic External Affairs Minister Sushma Swarajji and MOS VK Singh for the initiatives of the Ministry of External Affairs in this regard.

12. With regards to these temporary migrants going abroad in search of employments, it will also be prudent that attention is paid towards their skill up-gradation. Establishing linkages between the Government of India's skilling programmes and the skill gap that exists amongst the migrant workforce will go a long way in enhancing their employability as well as earnings.

13. Friends, Over the past couple of years, we have introduced several initiatives aimed at smart solutions. In 2014, we launched the e-Migrate platform for efficiency and transparency in the recruitment of "Emigration Check Required" (ECR) category of Indian workers. Such initiatives will surely help in protecting the rights of our workers proceeding abroad and ensure accountability of recruitment agents in India and their foreign employers.

14. As far as the vulnerabilities of expat Indians are concerned, I would also like to flag the concerns of women & girls in India marrying into

NRI families. Even as the government and its agencies deal with this issue, the concerns of this particular section can be most effectively addressed by the local Community Organisations. I take this opportunity to call upon the Indian Community Organisations abroad – many of whom have been awarded today, to continue complimenting the government's efforts by working in tandem.

15. Distinguished Guests, occasions such as this provide us with an opportunity to reaffirm our continued engagement with each other. At the same time, they also call for reorientation and rejuvenation in our areas of engagement. The government is implementing certain schemes for the youth who were born and brought up abroad. In this regard "The Know India Programme" is a flagship initiative under which such youth can visit India to rediscover their heritage and culture and get acquainted with contemporary India.

16. Similarly, the occasion calls for highlighting sectors in India that need your active support and engagement. We have a young population which needs to be equipped with the professional and technical education of the highest standards. The Indian Diaspora may consider participation in programmes such as GIAN - Global Initiative of Academic Networks, under which they can visit India for short term academic assignments with institutions of higher learning, including IITs and IIMs. They can also avail the fellowships and scholarship programmes offered by the Department of Science & Technology and Biotechnology, to explore avenues for joint research and development. Through such collaborations, our Institutions, Entrepreneurs and Innovators can enrich our education sector and skilling efforts.

17. Similarly for you, the opportunities for contributing to your motherland and being a part of its exciting growth story, are many and varied. Be it "Make in India", "Start up India", "Digital India" or "Swachh India"; all these programs provide ample opportunities for you to participate, contribute and benefit.

18. Friends, I am confident that your attachment with your place of origin and your connect with the nation have been strengthened, through your participation in the Pravasi Bharatiya Convention. I once again exhort all of you present here, to become a part of the evolving

Indian story, which is a wonderful story of 1.3 billion people of great diversity with underlying unity living under one system, one constitution and one flag.

19. I was also particularly happy to release the book of speeches by the Prime Minister on foreign policy today. His speeches tell the story of the emerging India, an India which is moving ahead, leaving behind the baggage of history and looking at the world with optimism.

20. In the end, I conclude by again congratulating all the recipients of the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman. I also wish you all a happy, prosperous and enriching year ahead.

Thank You.

Jai Hind!