

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE BANQUET HOSTED IN HONOUR OF H.
E. MAHMOUD ABBAS, PRESIDENT OF THE STATE OF PALESTINE**

RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN: MAY 16, 2017

Your Excellency Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I extend a very warm welcome to you, Mr. President and the distinguished members of your delegation.

Excellency, I recall, with pleasure, my own visit to your beautiful country in October, 2015. The warmth of the friendly people of Palestine throughout my visit has made a lasting impression on me. I am happy that your State Visit has given me the opportunity of receiving you once again in the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Mr. President,

India attaches high value to her long standing friendship and close co-operation with Palestine. Over the years, our bilateral relationship has expanded - to encompass many more areas of common interest. India remains firmly committed to assist the Palestinian people in achieving their developmental goals.

Excellency, India has been unwavering in its support for the aspiration of the Palestinian people to have their own country and, themselves, be the masters of their destiny. In 1938, Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our Nation voiced our country's rejection of the partition of Palestine and the creation of a state based on religion.

Later in 1947, India voted against the partition of Palestine at the United Nations General Assembly. India was the first Non-Arab State to recognize PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1974 and one of the first to recognize the State of Palestine in 1988.

We were delighted when the UNGA voted on November 29, 2012 to upgrade Palestine's status to "non-member observer state" and in favour of the installation of Palestinian flag at the UN premises along with the flags of other observer states in April, 2015.

Consistent with these efforts, India has expressed support for the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map. We have persistently advocated for the implementation of relevant resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and its Security Council. We were happy to have participated in the Middle East Peace Process Conference held in Paris in January, 2017.

Now, we earnestly hope for early resumption of talks between Palestine and Israel leading to the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine. We wish that the creation of a Palestinian State - that is a full member of the comity of nations, becomes your lasting personal legacy to your people.

Excellency,

India has been happy to contribute to Palestine's nation-building endeavour through technical and financial assistance. I am glad to note that most of the projects announced during my State Visit to Palestine are making good progress. I am also happy to learn that the foundation stone has been laid for the US\$ 12 million Palestine India Techno Park – which had been announced during my visit.

Mr. President, both our Governments recognize the indispensability of investing in human resources for building the strong foundation of a modern nation. My Government is pleased to have hosted over 700 Palestinian nationals in training programmes offered under the Indian Technical and Economic Co-operation programme.

Going forward, it is a matter of satisfaction that our Governments have agreed to intensify our mutual co-operation in the fields of security, information and communications technology, agriculture, education, culture, healthcare and sports. The youth exchange programme initiated by our Governments will help in forging a partnership between our future leaders for enhancing the mutual understanding between our peoples.

Excellency, this is a time of unprecedented global challenges. The scourge of terrorism is, unfortunately, one of the biggest threats faced by the international community. India believes that there can be no justification, whatsoever for terrorism. Its use as an instrument of state policy is perilous and reprehensible. We believe that closer co-ordination and concerted efforts by the international community are necessary to tackle this menace effectively.

I am confident that your State Visit will be an occasion for our Governments to review, together, all aspects of our co-operation and decide the next steps that we will take to further enhance it. India looks forward to the outcomes of our joint efforts.

With these few words, Mr. President, I once again welcome you and wish you a very successful visit to India.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I invite you to join me in raising a toast :

to the health and well-being of President Abbas;

to the enduring friendship between India and Palestine and;

to peace in this region and the continued progress and prosperity of the people of the State of Palestine.
