

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE  
AT THE BANQUET IN HONOUR OF THE KING OF BHUTAN, HIS  
MAJESTY, JIGME KHESAR NAMGYEL WANGCHUCK**

**Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi : 25-01-2013**

Your Majesty,

Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, King of Bhutan

Your Majesty,

Ashi Jetsun Pema Wangchuck, Queen of Bhutan,

Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government and the people of India, it is my privilege to extend to Your Majesties and to your distinguished delegation a very warm welcome. We are honoured that you will grace our celebrations on the occasion of India's 64<sup>th</sup> Republic Day. It is indeed a great pleasure to receive you here this evening. We warmly recall your State Visit to India in 2011 - soon after the auspicious occasion of your wedding. The substantial content and outcome of that visit have been regarded by both our Governments as yet another manifestation of the unique nature of the India-Bhutan relationship.

Your Majesty, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the Government and the people of India hold you in high esteem and admiration. Your sincere and inspiring words to your people at the time of your coronation - that you would protect them as a parent, care for them as a brother and serve them as a son "in the spirit of kindness, justice and equality", will be remembered for their simplicity and simultaneous grandeur.

On the completion of five years of Democratic Constitutional Monarchy in Bhutan, please accept, Your Majesty, our felicitations. You have guided your people through a period of political transition with prudence and sagacity. It is indeed a

tribute to Your Majesty's leadership that Bhutan has harmoniously embraced and adopted democracy and, in a short time, taken long strides towards progress and prosperity. Under your Government, Bhutan's GDP has grown at over 8% annually; you have brought down unemployment to only 2% and have achieved close to universal primary school enrolment, access to healthcare, safe drinking water, electricity and other such facilities for your happy people. Telecommunication services have reached all corners of your country and a network of motorable roads has been created. It is remarkable that while this development has occurred, Bhutan has steadfastly adhered to its constitutionally mandated target of 60% forest cover, and even expanded it to more than 70 %.

This balance, Your Majesty, highlights the exemplary manner in which your Government is pursuing its goal of Gross National Happiness, conceived way back in 1972 by your visionary father, His Majesty the Fourth King as a balance between the *"fundamental values of Kindness, Equality and Humanity and the necessary pursuit of economic growth."* We share your satisfaction at the unanimous recognition of the importance of happiness in the United Nations General Assembly and the declaration of 20<sup>th</sup> March as the International Day of Happiness. We rejoice in the success of this and other initiatives taken by Your Majesty's Government.

Your Majesty, India deeply values and attaches the highest importance to our traditional ties of close friendship with Bhutan, based on utmost sensitivity and respect for each other's vital interests and shared perspectives on strategic issues. Both our Governments are agreed that our friendship has been constant because of the pillars of trust and understanding on which it is founded. We should ensure that these pillars remain strong and unshakable. The Government and the people of India consider it a privilege to contribute, sharing our modest resources, to the realization of the Bhutanese way of socio-economic development. We should endeavour to strengthen our mechanisms for mutual consultation and co-operation especially in areas of shared interest and common concern. Government of India remains committed to further expanding and deepening our multi-faceted, mutually beneficial partnership - in accordance with the hopes and aspirations of the people of our two countries. As articulated by our first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who laid the foundation of our relationship, India's wish is that Bhutan should remain an

independent country choosing its own way of life and taking the path of progress according to its will.

Your Majesty, the well-being, stability and progress of Bhutan are central to our vision for the future. It is our firm belief that our exceptionally close and friendly ties will further strengthen in the coming years. We repose trust and confidence in Your Majesty's wise leadership, as a true "people's King". We wish you a long and fruitful reign and the very best of success in your endeavours for the people of Bhutan. As Bhutan prepares for its second democratic elections in a few months, the people of India send their good wishes to the people of Bhutan and wish for everlasting peace, prosperity and happiness in the Kingdom of Bhutan, the land blessed by Guru Padmsambhava.

With these words, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, may I now invite you to join me in a toast:-

- to the health and happiness of Their Majesties the King and Queen of Bhutan;
- to the well-being and prosperity of the people of Bhutan; and
- to abiding friendship and co-operation between India and Bhutan.