

# **SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE PEKING UNIVERSITY, CHINA ON THE TOPIC “INDIA –CHINA RELATIONS: 8 STEPS TO A PARTNERSHIP OF THE PEOPLE”**

GUANGZHOU, CHINA : 26.05.2016

1. I thank you for your kind words of welcome. I am delighted to be here today at this prestigious institution of higher learning. The Peking University is world renowned for the erudition of its scholars and inspired leadership. I greatly value this opportunity to meet the members of its management and faculty – and to see you, the future leaders of China, your bright smiles radiating energy and confidence.

2. This university has, throughout its proud history, welcomed international scholars and fostered close relationships with institutions in the neighbourhood and beyond. Its contribution to the rich academic exchanges between Indian and Chinese thinkers is noteworthy. One of the highpoints of this valuable discourse was the dialogue between Poet Laureate Rabindranath Tagore and his fellow intellectuals in China on the subject of an "Asian revival". This University has preserved and continued this tradition of a very rewarding interaction between scholar-monks of both India and China and strengthened mutual understanding through knowledge sharing and exchange of ideas. Two respected contemporary scholars from Peking University come to mind - Ji Xian Lin and Jin Ke Mu, who established the Department of Indian Studies here in the Peking University.

3. India and China are the inheritors of a great legacy – borne of our intensive intellectual and cultural contacts since the first millennium. We cannot imagine our common history without the central contribution of Kumarajiva or Bodhidharma or the records and experiences of XuanZang and Fa Xian from China. There are, of course, periods of which we do not have much information – perhaps these were stretches of time when there was less direct contact. However, it is a matter of great satisfaction that as we pay tribute to the outstanding legacy of these masters, we also vigorously re-engage to revive and re-connect this most satisfying aspect of our people to people relations.

4. In the early years of the last century, when India and China were engaged in a common struggle to break free of foreign domination and regain their rightful place in the world order, we had drawn strength and inspiration from each other. Indians fondly remember the solidarity and support extended by China's leaders to our freedom movement. Similarly, the Chinese people recall, with appreciation, the 1925 Resolution of the Indian National Congress in support of China after British-Indian troops had been dispatched to suppress an anti-imperialist struggle in China. The Medical Mission led by Dr. Kotnis in 1938 was yet another example of the genuine bonds of friendship and humanity between our people. His contribution under difficult circumstances is remembered and commemorated till this day both in India and China.

5. Mindful of the glorious past of our two civilizations, independent India was determined to seek friendship with China. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, as the President of the Indian National Congress, addressing the Sino-Indian Cultural Society on 28 December 1945 in Shantiniketan, articulated our vision of the India-China friendship. In his words, "*A strong and united China*

*and a strong and united India must come close to each other. Their amity and friendship will not only lead to mutual benefit but will also benefit the world at large."*

6. In the last seven decades, our bilateral relations have been tested by difficulties and challenges; but the determination of the Indian people to safeguard their friendship with the people of China has visibly endured. It was demonstrated in India's early recognition of the People's Republic of China in December 1949, the establishment of our diplomatic relations in April 1950 and India's constant public support through the '60s and '70s for the admission of the People's Republic of China to the UN and the restitution of its Permanent Membership of the UN Security Council. Through this period, our relations have witnessed significant expansion and diversification. Our shared civilisational past and our common Asian identity have been at the core of this aspiration. Today, as India and China pursue their respective developmental goals we both seek to live in friendship and realise our common dream of an Asian Century. Both our nations have reaped rich political and economic dividends from this wise and judicious approach.

7. As I address you this morning, I offer my gratitude and homage to the remarkable visionaries in both India and China who took upon themselves the responsibility of enhancing both the understanding between our peoples and the quality of the close academic connections between our two ancient civilizations.

8. Today, at a time of global economic uncertainty, our two countries, despite the pressure of having 40 per cent of the world's human population, have managed to maintain unity and growth. Our joint contribution to the world economy as well as regional and global stability, cannot be underestimated: India and China are poised to join the ranks of leading global powers.

9. It is incumbent on us, as emerging economic powers to remain equally focused on nurturing regional and global prosperity. We both are at the threshold of an opportunity to join hands and create a resurgence, a positive energy, an "Asian Century". This will not be an easy task. We will need to overcome obstacles with resolve and fortitude. We must persevere to realise this dream. We can do this together. We can do it if we join hands in a durable friendship. I would like to share my vision on how we could do this.

10. I would stress that political understanding between our two nations is vital for a Closer Developmental Partnership. One of the ways it could be done is through **enhanced political communication**. In India, we have a bipartisan commitment to strengthening our partnership with China. The frequent contacts between our respective leaders bear testimony to this. We have broadened the "common ground" and learned to manage our differences. There are challenges -including the Boundary Question that still need to be addressed comprehensively. While it is natural for neighbours to have a difference of views on certain issues from time to time, I consider it a test of our political acumen when we are called upon to draw upon our civilisational wisdom and resolve these differences to the mutual satisfaction of both sides. Both sides should work with the aim of ensuring that we do not burden our coming generations by leaving our unresolved problems and differences to them. I am confident that by ensuring that these matters are not aggravated and by remaining sensitive to mutual concerns, we can minimize our differences and maximize our convergences.

11. It is for these reasons that I am glad that we are steadily diversifying our partnership in every area of common interest. China is our largest trading partner. Our developmental experiences are arguably most relevant for each other. Our respective achievements in infrastructure, mobility, energy, skills development, healthcare, education and urbanization offer a fertile ground for exchange and cooperation. Our defence & security exchanges now include annual military exercises. There is greater Chinese investment in India and vice versa. Government-to-Government mechanisms include high-level dialogues between the National Reform and Development Commission of China and the NITI Aayog of India. Both our Governments are fully committed to this process and to building a durable framework for our ties. I firmly believe that India and China must enhance their bilateral partnership if both countries are to play a significant and constructive role in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. When Indians and Chinese understand the benefits of cooperating to address global challenges and as they perceive the advantages of building shared interests, we will, in doing so, unleash the potential of our mutually advantageous partnership. There are no limits to what our two peoples can jointly achieve. I am convinced that a qualitative transformation of our ties calls for placing people at its very centre. I therefore propose that our two sides should focus on fostering a people-centric partnership to create a broad level of contact between our two countries.

12. To build a people-centric partnership we must have mutual trust predicated on mutual respect and a better appreciation of our respective political and social systems. This can be achieved by closer contacts at all levels. As you are aware, India chose to be a secular parliamentary democracy. Our system of participative governance is founded on the principles of tolerance, inclusiveness and consensus. Attempts to derail our peace through acts of terrorism have not shaken our faith. Our society is resilient and public interest is protected by a free media, an independent judiciary and a vibrant civil society.

13. I would emphasise the need to nurture constituencies on both sides - with deep stakes in the future of India-China relations. In spite of having more than a third of the world's population, the contacts between the people's representatives on both sides are still very limited. More regular contacts between our people's representatives at official and non-official levels is the need of the hour. We must broaden these contacts - beyond capitals to provincial and local bodies. A good beginning was made in establishing the India-China State / Provincial Leaders Forum during Prime Minister Modi's visit to China last year. We are encouraged that Province-to-State contacts are now growing and both sides are working to expand exchanges between local bodies.

14. **Second**, both India and China are 'young' societies. Our youth share common aspirations and perceptions. Their annual exchanges have been fruitful but both sides need to synergize their potential by including more educational opportunities, youth festivals, sports exchanges, youth-oriented tourism and social media linkages etc.

15. **Third**, as citizens of a digital age, we recognise the power of visual images. This makes joint film production a useful instrument for creating positive perceptions. We should endeavor to expand the reach of our initiatives through regular screening and televising of our films and programmes in both countries.

16.**Fourth**, we need to re-invigorate our intellectual and cultural exchanges. Yoga in India and Tai Chi in China as well as traditional medicine are part of our cultural heritage. Our annual India-China Think-Tank Forum and High-level Media Forum are good initiatives. Greater exchanges between institutions of higher learning, more cultural festivals and joint research and scholarship programmes can help dispel the notion that we need to look to the West and not to each other to make progress in education, science & technology.

17.**Fifth**, travel can be a very important binding factor. It is obvious that in the coming decade, Indians and Chinese will represent the largest volume of tourist travel globally. The immense potential of India as a tourism destination must be better projected. I commend both Governments for holding the Visit India Year in China last year and the Visit China Year in India this year. We welcome your Government's decision to open a second route for the Kailash-Mansarovar pilgrimage. Indians would like to have more opportunities to travel to their holy sites in China and, in turn, welcome more Chinese visits to Buddhist pilgrimage centres in India.

18.**Sixth**, civil society is playing an increasingly significant role in both our societies, addressing a range of common concerns including the challenges of urbanization, environmental degradation, the urgent need for skills development and the digital divide. By pursuing sustainable solutions and sharing experiences, civil societies on both sides can collaborate – duly respecting the parameters in which they are required to operate in our respective countries.

19.**Seventh**, we have a common approach to global and developmental issues that facilitate our strong cooperation in multilateral fora including the G-20, BRICS, EAS, AIIB, SCO and the United Nations. We can use such platforms to enhance public awareness of the desire of both our countries for a shared future shaped by us together. As our respective peoples and the world see our Governments working together at the global and regional level, they, too, will support and contribute to the achievement of our shared goals.

20.**Finally**, trade and commerce can be the most powerful agents in reinforcing our complementarities. We are pleased that in the past decade there has been substantial growth in our bilateral trade and investment ties, but there is a vast untapped potential waiting to be fully realised. We invite Chinese companies to participate in the 'Make in India' initiative and to join us in Start Up India. Let us jointly innovate to create a new model for business.

21. Ladies and gentlemen, I am confident that by placing these eight pillars at the foundation of a "people centric" approach we can successfully enhance and strengthen our co-operation to the mutual benefit of both our peoples.

22. In 1942, Gandhiji had said "*I look forward to the day when a free India and a free China will cooperate together in friendship and brotherhood for their own good and for the good of Asia and the world.*" I call on the peoples of India and China to tirelessly strive for that objective - despite the current challenges. I am confident that we can work together to achieve this golden vision.

23. Mr. President, I once again thank you for hosting me today.

Thank you.