

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
AT THE BANQUET HOSTED IN HONOUR OF HIS EXCELLENCY MR  
SHAVKAT MIRZIYOYEV, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
UZBEKISTAN**

**Rashtrapati Bhavan, October 1, 2018**

I extend a very warm and cordial welcome to President Mirziyoyev and First Lady on their first State Visit to India.

Your visit Mr. President heralds a new era of friendship and cooperation in our Strategic Partnership. We deeply value the importance you attach to enhancing and deepening our age-old ties.

As old friends and strategic partners, we are privileged to possess a strong foundation of historical ties to build our contemporary relations. You started your journey to India with a visit to the Taj Mahal, a monument which most vividly symbolises our shared history. Traders and travellers, writers and poets, artists and artisans have since ancient times contributed to forging a close cultural bonding between our peoples.

We both rejoice in the sufi musings of Alisher Navoi and the spiritual qawwali of Amir Khusrau. Remains of Buddhist monasteries in Samarkand and Termez and the art of Kashidakari and ikat draw us together in thought and in creativity.

Excellency, your visit is taking place on the eve of birth anniversaries of Mahatma Gandhi and our former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. With both, you have a very special connect. We are grateful to you and to your people for the love and affection you have showered upon them.

Tomorrow, we are launching our worldwide celebrations of the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Father of our Nation. As we mark the fourth anniversary of our Swachh Bharat programme started on 2<sup>nd</sup>

October 2014, I thank you for the participation of Uzbekistan in the Mahatma Gandhi International Sanitation Convention being held from 29<sup>th</sup> September to 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2018. We want to share with and learn from you and from all our international partners as we strive to realize the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi of a Swachh Bharat, of a clean India.

Excellency, today we have committed ourselves to take our partnership to a higher trajectory. We have signed several key bilateral agreements to strengthen our Strategic Partnership. We are aiming ambitiously to grow our trade and investment. We want to work together to secure our people from the forces of terrorism and extremism; to intensify our defence cooperation; and to bring peace and stability in the region.

We are also committed to bring the fruits of science and technology to better the lives of our peoples. And we are initiating plans to bring the benefits of digital-age and Start-ups to our youth.

Excellency, our bilateral ties are doing well. But we want to, not just grow, but gallop in our partnership. And for this, we have to connect better - through airports, sea-ports, highways and i-ways. New opportunities await us to trade and taste our mangoes and our melons!

Excellency, we thank you for supporting our membership to the Ashgabat Agreement to foster connectivity in the region. We also invite Uzbekistan to join the International North South Transport Corridor.

Excellency, Uzbekistan-India friendship has the depth and warmth of the past and the present. It has now to connect with the limitless possibilities of the future.

On this optimistic note, I invite all our guests to raise a toast to:

- the health and well-being of President and First Lady of the Republic of Uzbekistan;

- the continued progress and prosperity of the peoples of our two great nations; and
- the ever-lasting friendship between Uzbekistan and India.

Rahmat Thank you