

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE MEETING WITH ITEC/ICCR/HINDI ALUMNI/FRIENDS OF
INDIA GROUP**

Ashgabat, April 2, 2022

I am delighted to meet you all today during my visit to your beautiful country. I thank you for taking out the time to attend this event.

This is my first visit to Turkmenistan. Coincidentally, it is also the first visit of any Indian President to this country. I also have the privilege to be one of the first Heads of State to visit Turkmenistan following the election of the new President His Excellency Mr. Serdar Berdimuhamedov. This month, India and Turkmenistan are celebrating the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. All these make this visit very special.

As you are aware, India and Turkmenistan share historical and civilizational linkages. Our peoples and cultures have mingled over centuries. Numerous archaeological discoveries have proved the close exchanges our societies had in the past, from Indus Valley civilization, through common Buddhist heritage and the Mughal period. In modern times, these linkages have been nurtured through regular high-level visits and official-level interactions. India considers Turkmenistan as part of its extended neighbourhood. We were one of the first countries to recognize Turkmenistan's independence in 1991 and establish formal diplomatic relations in 1992.

In accordance with our belief that the whole world is one family, India has always been willing to share its experience and expertise with countries of the world, especially the developing world. The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation, that is, ITEC programme was launched in 1964 with the main objective of

assisting friendly countries in capacity building and training of manpower. In the 5-6 decades of its existence, the ITEC programme has trained over 200,000 persons from over 161 countries including Turkmenistan. The ITEC courses are flexible and are based on the host country's requirement. I am happy to learn that over 400 Turkmen citizens have so far benefitted from ITEC courses since 1993. We would appreciate your feedback in order to further fine-tune it to meet requirements of Turkmen candidates.

Similarly, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, that is, ICCR has been sponsoring undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate and post-doctoral studies for foreign students in various academic institutions across India. Every year, we offer around 20 scholarships to students from Turkmenistan and so far more than 300 Turkmen students have been supported by ICCR under its Cultural Exchange Programme and General Scholarship Scheme. I am sure those among you who have availed the ICCR's scholarship scheme will have fond memories of their stay in India and have been able to secure gainful employment with the help of the degree earned through the scheme.

As part of my Government's endeavour to popularize Hindi abroad, we established a Hindi Chair in the Azadi National Institute of World Languages in Ashgabat in September 2010 through an inter-governmental agreement. Ever since then, a Hindi teacher deputed from India has been teaching Hindi language to Turkmen students at the Institute. I am pleased to know that there are many people now in Turkmenistan who can converse in Hindi fluently, thanks to the efforts of the Chair. Those of you who are alumni of the Institute would have learned more about India through Hindi language studies and have helped promote better understanding of our country in Turkmenistan.

Ever since my arrival yesterday in the White Marble City of Ashgabat, I have experienced the warmth and hospitality of the

Turkmen people. In the morning today, I had the opportunity to meet the new President of Turkmenistan, the young and energetic His Excellency Serdar Berdimuhamedov. We discussed ways to take forward the close and cordial relations existing between our two countries. I hope that friends like you would always be there to support the political leadership in carrying out the vision for a strong and progressive cooperation between India and Turkmenistan.

I thank you once again for coming to meet me and attend this event.

Sag bol!! Thank you