

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE BANQUET HOSTED IN
HONOUR OF HIS EXCELLENCY Mr TRAN DAI QUANG, THE
PRESIDENT OF VIETNAM**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, 3 March, 2018

Xin Chao, Namaste!

I am honoured to welcome Your Excellency and your delegation. And especially so, as we are celebrating important milestones in our relationship.

Last year was our Year of Friendship when we commemorated the 45th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations. It was also the 10th anniversary of our Strategic Partnership and 25 years of India-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership.

I also had the honour to host the ASEAN leaders in January for the ASEAN-INDIA Summit. We were most delighted by the presence of Prime Minister Phuc at the event.

Excellency, our civilisational ties, however, are much older. Over 2000 years ago, monks from India took Buddhism to Vietnam. Sanskrit and Hindu texts followed thereafter. The Hindu Champa rulers connected us both in several ways.

These exchanges set in place a two-way interaction and in the process we both enriched each other.

The great leaders of our freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi and President Ho Chi Minh, energised our linkages in the modern era. In February 1958, exactly 60 years ago, President Ho Chi Minh, whom we all know as Uncle Ho, visited India and met with my then predecessor, Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

On the path shown by them, we have today built our close friendship.

Excellency, I am happy that you began your India journey with a visit to Bodh Gaya. I hope the blessings of Lord Buddha just after your New Year TET would be auspicious for our relationship as well.

On my part, when I was the Governor of Bihar, I have been most fortunate to have visited Bodh Gaya several times and sought his blessings.

Excellency, our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership based on robust defence and security cooperation, broad-based economic engagement and innovative scientific and technological cooperation is on course.

And we have meaningfully brought in our people to its fold, be it through training, development cooperation or cultural outreach. I am happy that our youths are connecting with each other through yoga, entertainment and enterprise.

Today, Vietnam is the world's second largest rice exporter after India and we are happy to have partnered with your country in its emergence as a major agricultural economy.

The Cuu Long Rice Research Institute stands as a tall symbol of India-Vietnam friendship.

Excellency, we firmly believe that a strong India-Vietnam partnership would lead to peace and prosperity for our people and for the wider region.

To this end, Indian and Vietnamese robust economic growth and energy must complement each other.

Excellency, Vietnam is a strong pillar of our Act East Policy and we remain committed to ASEAN's centrality and to an open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based regional architecture.

We are keen to enhance our cultural engagement and outreach with you. Our archaeological experts are helping in the restoration of the UNESCO world heritage site in My Son and we will continue with such efforts in other areas as well.

Excellency, your visit will significantly contribute to strengthening our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and will lay the roadmap for enhanced engagement in the future.

On this optimistic note, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, may I invite you to join me in raising a toast:—

- to the health and happiness of President Tran Dai Quang and Madam Nguyen Thi Hien;
- to the well-being and prosperity of the people and leadership of Vietnam; and
- to the ever-lasting friendship between India and Vietnam.

Thank You.