

**ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE COMMUNITY RECEPTION**

DJIBOUTI, OCTOBER 3, 2017

I feel privileged to meet and address our Pravasi family in Djibouti. I am overwhelmed by your warmth and affection.

It is a matter of great honour for me to be the first Indian President to visit Djibouti.

It is also my first visit outside India after being elected President. This is no coincidence but a conscious decision on our part. Our relations with this beautiful continent have a special place in our hearts, and we remain ever committed to deepen our fraternal bonds with the African people.

Friends,

As I speak about India's special and enduring partnership with Africa, I am reminded of our greatest Pravasi, Mahatma Gandhi, for whom this continent was a sacred land. For it was here, that he, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, became the Mahatma.

This afternoon, shortly after I landed in Djibouti, I had the honour to pay my respects to Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our Nation. This was even more special for I did so at the Nelson Mandela square. Remembering two of the greatest leaders to have ever walked this Earth, and that too, together, was truly a humbling experience. I could not have begun my visit to Africa more profoundly.

Friends,

Historical links and people-to-people contacts have existed between India and Djibouti since times immemorial.

The stories of our ancestors toiling in the Bab-al-Mandab are too well known. They bonded with Somali and Afar traders; and exchanged ideas and commerce with Arab merchants. I recount this tale to tell you how strong our maritime connect with Africa once was. We must now try to rediscover this shared history and identity.

Much effort is required to resurrect our common heritage, not just for old time sake, but also to build a contemporary partnership. Blue economy and the depths of Indian Ocean provide immense possibilities to build a sustainable future. Its warm waters also present common security challenges.

The Ocean which connects us may be Indian in name, but belongs to all of us. Let it bind us together, as it had done centuries ago.

Friends, Our historic ties with Djibouti have given much comfort in building a multifaceted partnership. And while we have done our best to enhance our Government to Government relations; all of you present here have been the real champion of this partnership.

I say this because I know that in whatever capacity you have made Djibouti your home – be it as traders, as professionals, or as skilled workers, you have shown a spirit of selfless and dedicated service to the people around you.

You have, while preserving your traditions, family values and strong work ethic, adapted very well in your adopted home, becoming pillars of support for the local community and a source of pride for us.

And while you celebrate and preserve your fairs and festivals, you must also smear your colour and beauty on your Djiboutian friends. You must share your culture and your stories with them.

Someday, I would like to join you in Djibouti to splash the colour of Holi or to light the Aarti of Navratri. I hope I can count on your invitation!

We Indians take much pride in our languages; be it Gujarati, Punjabi, Tamil, Malayalam or Hindi. I am truly elated that the Indian school here is passing them on to our younger generations.

Friends,

My message to you is that while we have Ambassador or Rajdoot to represent our government, all of you here are Rashtradoot or Representative of our Nation. Every Indian across the world is a Representative of India as he or she is the one who helps the world to understand India – its ethos and its strengths

The rise of India is opening new opportunities for collaboration. Our Diaspora has an important role in building bridges between India and the world.

India is on a high growth trajectory. There is optimism and excitement in our country. We have undertaken to transform the lives of ordinary people, not in the distant future, but by 2022 when we celebrate 75 years of our Independence.

Through digital technology, innovation and clean energy, we want to leap-frog in our development pathway. From high speed rail to high speed fiber optic, we want to provide the best for our people. Our flag-ship programmes-Swachh Bharat, Start-up India, Digital India and Make in India are making good progress.

Our financial inclusion scheme Jan Dhan Yojana has provided formal banking facilities to over 300 million poor people.

Alongside economic empowerment, we are equally conscious of our social commitment. Our UJJWALA scheme has so far provided clean cooking fuel to over 29 million rural women. For them the drudgery of collecting firewood and inhaling killer fumes are now things of the past.

Our approach to development has been to combine it with good governance. Fighting corruption and giving every person his or her due remains an article of faith for us.

Friends,

We want to embrace and connect with our Diaspora abroad, more than ever before.

Through the use of Social Media, we have made it easier for the people to reach the government. We have started on-line portal MADAD to attend to consular

grievances. Today, our Embassies are home to every Indian abroad. This is much to our delight and satisfaction.

Today, more than any other time, and in Djibouti more than any other place, you would know that India is there for you. Operation Rahat that we carried out from Djibouti spotlights our unflinching commitment to our people abroad. We are grateful to the Government of Djibouti for supporting and standing by us.

The evacuation of 5000 Indian nationals together with 2000 nationals of about 40 countries could not have been done without your support. I would like to especially commend the role of our Honorary Consul Shri Nalin Kothari, his team and the community here. I must tell you that Operation Rahat has given us enduring respect and recognition from the global community.

This Operation was just the beginning. Today, we are reaching out to all those in need. Be it women in distress in London or those needed to be evacuated from the Hurricane struck Islands in the Caribbean.

Friends,

I have come to Djibouti with a message of friendship and solidarity. I conveyed to the leadership the importance we attach to strengthening ties with this fraternal country. I am confident that my visit will open a new chapter of multi-faceted cooperation between the two countries.

I invite you to partner us in the rise of new India – an India which is inspired by the vision of our founding fathers and is determined to realize the aspirations of its people.

And as I do so, I am reminded of an African saying: *If you want to walk fast, you walk alone, but if you want to walk far, you walk together.* I leave that thought with you.

I thank you all for coming here today. I wish you and your families the best of health and happiness.

Thank you and Jai Hind!