

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE VALEDICTORY CEREMONY OF AERO INDIA-21**

Bengaluru, February 5, 2021

I am delighted to be here today among you all for the valedictory ceremony of the 13th edition of Aero India and to witness the grand international aero show. The participation of defence ministers and senior defence officials from several nations and many business leaders from around the world has added a significant value to this event. I am sure that the delegates would have experienced the vibrant energy of a new India and witnessed our vast capabilities as well as many opportunities that our country offers in the defence and aerospace sectors. I am also sure that this event provided the participating nations and industries an ideal platform to exchange ideas and forge partnerships.

The past year has been a time of unprecedented hardships due to Covid-19. Its adverse impacts have been felt on all walks of life the world over. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, I am happy that Aero India 2021 has been organised successfully. It has been held without compromising its spirit while following the Covid-appropriate norms. Here I want to praise the courage and bravery of the Indian Air Force and our pilots for displaying exemplary professionalism in protecting India's skies and strengthening the country's defence.

Aero India 2021 has been an unprecedented success. I am told that high-level delegations from 43 countries and exhibitors from 530 companies have participated in the event. Many more across the world got associated with the event virtually, which is the world's first mega event of this kind to be held in the hybrid format.

I have also been informed that 201 new business partnerships have been developed in the form of MoUs, agreements and collaborations among various nations and companies.

Our Union Defence Minister, Karnataka Chief Minister and their teams deserve an enthusiastic ovation for their hard work. Also, the delegates, participants and business leaders who have travelled long distances and ensured the success of this event, they all deserve special appreciation.

I have been told that a Conclave of Defence Ministers of Indian Ocean Region, on the theme of 'Enhanced Peace, Security, and Co-operation in the Indian Ocean', was organised on the margins of Aero India 2021. It is a matter of great significance that as many as 28 IOR countries participated in it.

India has always been an ardent advocate of universal peace and development. IOR is an important region because of its rich natural resources and strategic location. We have floated the idea of 'SAGAR' which stands for 'Security and Growth for All in the Region', to promote co-operation in the Indian Ocean Region. It is important that IOR nations focus on fostering political, economic, cultural and defence co-operation.

We have always been ready to share our expertise and resources with all IOR nations for planning and coordination in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. After the Covid-19 outbreak, under Operation SAGAR 1 we reached out to our neighbours and assisted them with medical teams, medicines as well as diagnostic kits, ventilators, masks, gloves and other medical supplies. In keeping with India's stated commitment to use its vaccine production and delivery capacity to help the entire humanity fight the Covid-19 pandemic, supplies under grant assistance to our friendly foreign nations have already begun.

The 'Chiefs of Air Staff Conclave' was another highlight of this event. I am pleased to note that deliberations focusing on areas of mutual interest were very fruitful and would help in creating a peaceful world order.

'Start-Up Manthan', the annual event for defence start-ups, has also drawn significant attention. Innovations for Defence Excellence, that is, IDEX, was launched in 2018 to encourage innovators, entrepreneurs, MSME and start-ups to engage with the defence establishment and solve military challenges. Through this platform, many start-ups are developing new technologies and products for military use. This is helping us develop indigenous innovation and self-reliance in defence technologies. In the 29 innovation challenges issued by the Indian military and Defence Public Sector Undertakings, and from over 1,200 applications from start-ups, around 100 winners referred to as IDEX Innovators have been selected so far.

The Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, had planted the seeds of Swadeshi and Self-reliance during our freedom struggle. Now we have renewed this pledge and are making determined efforts with 'Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan' by giving a fresh impetus in this direction with strategic policy measures backed by time-bound actions. Our vision is to create a robust economy and infrastructure alongside developing competitive supply chains and integrate them globally.

The reforms initiated in India in the last six years offer unprecedented opportunities to investors and private companies in the defence and aerospace sectors. We have taken a number of policy initiatives aimed at placing India among the top nations in the defence sector with twin objectives of self-reliance and export promotion.

Among measures aimed at transforming India into a major defence manufacturing hub are: Notification of a 'negative list' of 101 items; reforms in defence procurement policies and procedures; liberalisation of the industrial licensing requirements; increase of FDI in the defence sector up to 74 per cent through the automatic route and 100 per cent through the Government route; simplifying and offering incentives to offset discharges; streamlining export authorisation procedures and approving export of major indigenous weapons like the Akash missile. I have also been informed that with consistent FDI reforms, the foreign investment in the defence and aerospace sectors has grown by 200 per cent in the last five years.

The government is focused on promoting the 'Ease of Doing Business' to encourage manufacturers to set up units in India. The defence sector has also been witnessing steady liberalisation. Industrial licensing requirements have been eliminated for a number of items. The processes for industrial licence and export authorisations have been simplified and made on-line. To facilitate establishment of defence industries and give impetus to the MSMEs, two defence corridors have been established in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. All these efforts are expected to unleash a huge potential of job creation in the country while taking India onto the path of self-reliance in defence production.

The tremendous growth of India's strength in aerospace in recent years may be fathomed from the development of the new indigenous Light Combat Aircraft – Tejas. I am happy to note that Hindustan Aeronautics Limited has got the orders for 83 Tejas aircrafts from Indian Air Force valued at more than Rs. 48,000 crore. I am also told that the capacity of LCA production at HAL is being enhanced.

Aero India 2021 is a living proof of India's ever-growing strength in the defence and aerospace sectors at the global level. The event has exhibited that the global confidence in India's capabilities is growing steadily. Today, India is not just a market, but is also a land of

immense opportunities for the whole world, including in the defence sector.

I am confident that the 13th edition of Aero India will contribute significantly towards strengthening India's self-reliance in the defence sector as well as establishing India as a manufacturer for the world. I wish you all the best in your endeavours.

Thank you,

Jai Hind!