

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,  
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
AT THE INDIA-CZECH REPUBLIC BUSINESS FORUM**

**Prague, September 7, 2018**

1. I am delighted to address the India-Czech Business Forum. I am happy to see enthusiastic participation from both sides in our engagement today. We have members from the Czech Chambers of Commerce and the Czech Association of Medium and Small Enterprises in the gathering. From India, we have a 50 member delegation representing the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Confederation of Indian Industry, the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Trade Promotion Council of India with us. I warmly welcome all of you. Your strong presence here is indeed a signature of the trust that you place in the India-Czech business co-operation.
  
2. I understand you have had a fruitful day of engagement. I am hopeful that our economic ties will get a boost from your business deliberations today. India and the Czech Republic are two ancient civilizations. There was a flourishing trade in spices, between India and the Kingdom of Bohemia, as early as the 9th century. The Czechoslovak Consulate opened in Bombay in 1920 even before India's independence. The Bata Shoe Company was founded in this country but its widespread presence in India compels us to consider it our own. Such early and rich history of engagement can only inspire us to be more optimistic, of the future of India-Czech trade and investment relations.
  
3. Today, I had meaningful discussions with President Zeman, on taking forward India-Czech multi-faceted relations, with special emphasis on our economic ties. We are both convinced that there is immense potential to take the relationship to a higher level.
  
4. We consider the Czech Republic as a leading economic partner. India's growth story and Czech technological expertise and manufacturing prowess make the two natural partners. India is the fastest growing, major economy in the world, with a growth rate of

8.2% last quarter. We have undertaken an ambitious plan to build next-generation infrastructure, including smart cities, airports, high-speed trains, highways, and cyber connectivity. There is a rapid growth in construction of national highways, and there are ambitious plans to develop more than a hundred rivers as national waterways. These open up immense opportunities for our international partners.

5. We have also undertaken bold reforms to boost our manufacturing sector, and 'Make in India' initiative. A major reform is the introduction of Goods and Services Tax. This has fulfilled the dreams of 1.3 billion Indians to have ONE NATION, ONE TAX and ONE MARKET for the first time. Both the central and state governments have undertaken measures to make it easier for business to be established in India. These reforms have helped India jump 42 places in the World Bank Ease of Doing Business Index.
6. Our business friendly policy has allowed Foreign Direct Investment worth US \$ 60 billion to flow into the country in 2016-17. India has recently become the 6<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world and is poised to be a 5 trillion dollar economy by 2025. The Indian growth and demand, complemented with a large consumer market, offer huge business opportunities and scope for investment. Our flagship programs including the Swachh Bharat i.e. Clean India, Skill India, Make in India, and Digital India offer immense prospects for Czech companies to join the Indian growth story.
7. Our economies have significant complementarities which can be leveraged for mutually beneficial cooperation. Indian companies have achieved expertise in the fields of IT, Infrastructure, pharmaceuticals, automobiles and services. India offers market for scaling up strengths of Czech companies in heavy engineering, defense, advanced manufacturing, automotive and energy fields. I also see a lot of scope for Indian and Czech companies to engage in new-age technologies and join hands to reap the benefits of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
8. Defense sector has been a vital area of cooperation between the two countries. Defence production in India has been opened for the private sector to participate. Our defence requirements are huge.

Indian companies are looking at Czech defence majors to partner them. I invite Czech defence companies to come, invest and manufacture in India.

9. Major Indian companies have invested in the Czech Republic in sectors like IT, vehicles, tea, textile, pharmaceutical, and auto-components. Czech investments in India are present in the machinery, transportation, power and automotive sectors. Czech auto brand SKODA is doing very well in India and we are happy that they have announced new plans to expand their production with an investment of US \$ 1 billion.
10. The investment by Czech majors in 'Make in India' initiative is a reaffirmation of the immense promise of Indo-Czech relationship. From BATA to SKODA, the story of India-Czech partnership has been defined by popular embrace, sustainable practices and high business confidence. We encourage Czech enterprises to remain invested in the Indian growth story.
11. India-Czech bilateral trade at US \$ 1.07 billion, does not really reflect our true potential. There is a need to redouble our efforts. From our side, our Commerce and Industry Minister will lead a business delegation next month to co-chair the Joint India-Czech Economic Commission, to be held in Prague. I am sure the Commission meeting will generate new ideas to give a boost to our bilateral trade and diversify our economic linkages.
12. Another area which we must always consider is participation in each other's fairs and exhibitions. India's participation as a partner country in the prestigious MSV International Engineering Expo in Brno, last October reciprocated by Czech Republic's participation as a partner country in the International Engineering Sourcing Show in Chennai this year has resulted in new business openings for the two sides.
13. Entertainment is another growing area of economic engagement. A number of Indian and Bollywood films have been shot in the Czech Republic. This has led to increased tourist flow from India to this country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. The Indian economy is a dynamic story. We urge you to explore, initiate and expand your footprint in India. Indian companies are also keen to invest and establish new business tie-ups here. I invite you to partner us in India's exciting and transformative journey which is going to usher in a new era not just for India and the Czech Republic but for the entire world.

Thank you!