

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,  
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
AT THE INDIAN COMMUNITY RECEPTION IN ICELAND**

**Reykjavik, September 9, 2019**

1. I am happy to be here in Reykjavik the northern most capital city of the world. I would like to thank you for your very special and warm welcome. The Bharatnatyam performance was spectacular. We also heard a beautiful local song by the famous Icelandic singer - Geir Olafsson. He has also sung Mahatma Gandhi's favourite bhajan – Vaishnav Jan to tene Kahiye. This bhajan has been sung by people in all corners of the world, as a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary this year.
2. आइसलैंड की मेरी यह यात्रा, भारत के किसी राष्ट्रपति की दूसरी राजकीय यात्रा है। पहली यात्रा वर्ष 2005 के ग्रीष्म ऋतु में हुई थी। उस समय यहां भारतीय समुदाय के लोग अभी की तुलना में कम संख्या में थे। आज मुझे आप सबसे मिलकर बहुत प्रसन्नता हुई है। अभी जब मैं सांस्कृतिक कार्यक्रम देख रहा था तो कुछ समय के लिए मुझे ऐसा लगा जैसे मैं विदेश में नहीं बल्कि भारत के किसी शहर में हूँ। विदेश में रहने वाले अपने भाइयों और बहनों से मिलकर हमेशा एक विशेष अनुभूति होती है। मैं, अपने साथ, भारत से आपके परिवारजनों और मित्रों की ओर से आप लोगों के लिए शुभकामनाएं लाया हूँ।
3. Tomorrow, I will be meeting President Gudni Johanneson and a day later Prime Minister Katrin Jakobsdotir to take forward India-Iceland relations. I will also be visiting the world famous and Iceland's pride - the site of the 8<sup>th</sup> century Parliament – Althingi. I look forward to speaking at the University of Iceland to share my thoughts with the youth.

4. I am accompanied on this visit by a high level delegation comprising our Minister of State for Women and Child Development, Madam Debasree Chaudhari, she hails from West Bengal; and two Members of Parliament from Lok Sabha, Dr. Ramapati Ram Tripathi from Uttar Pradesh and Mr. Basanta Kumar Panda from Odisha. I am also accompanied by a 35 member Indian business delegation. They would be meeting their counterparts to add more business to India-Iceland relations.
5. I am told that those gathered here represent a wide section of society ranging from students, researchers, teachers, businesspersons to professionals and Start-up entrepreneurs. We live in an age defined by knowledge, technology and digital space. These represent the new markers of our growing ties with Iceland. I am, therefore, not surprised that our globally reputed professionals are the leading lights of the community here. I thank the people of Iceland for welcoming you in this beautiful country. And I convey my deep gratitude to the Friends of India present here. Through their love and affection for Indian culture, music, films and of course, food, they have created a happy home for you, far away from your family and country.
6. We are proud of your achievements. You convey an image of India that is highly mobile, highly skilled and one whose people are writing the script of the machine-intelligence age. You are contributing to the local society through your advanced skills, but equally through your warmth and friendship. We have sent our Ambassador here. He has the responsibility to strengthen our ties with Iceland. You have been ably assisting him in his work, as true cultural ambassadors of India, representing its age-old belief in the maxim - "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*" that is the entire world is one family.
7. I am happy that you have forged deep relations with your Icelandic friends. You have established various friendship

organizations. The Indo-Icelandic Friendship Society and the Iceland-Pondicherry Friendship Association have significantly contributed to promoting ties between India and Iceland. I understand that Yoga is very popular in Iceland. It is natural to be so. The people of Iceland understand the value of living in harmony with nature and with oneself, which are basic to yoga. I am happy that you have been celebrating International Day of Yoga with great enthusiasm. You should also make efforts to promote Ayurveda and our other traditional knowledge systems.

8. We are forging deep people-to-people relations with Iceland. I am happy that soon Hindi would be taught at the University of Iceland. This would provide yet another opportunity to strengthen cultural understanding between Iceland and India. On your part, I have been told you have learnt the Icelandic language and embraced the local culture. I am also happy that you have given a place of pride to your own native languages, be it Punjabi, Tamil, Malayalam, Bengali or Gujarati – and speak in them in your homes and among your families. Even though far away from home, you have been celebrating your fairs and festivals. Next month, we will be celebrating Dusshera and Diwali, to be followed by Chhatt and Bhai Dooj. We will remember you as we light the diya on Diwali and celebrate family bonds on Bhai dooj. The strength of India lies in its traditions and diversity and you should do your best to nurture them and keep them alive.
9. You would be aware of developments in India. We are on a transformational growth path. We have set a target to become a 5 trillion dollar economy by 2025. Major reform process is underway. There is a new confidence in India. Our youth is brimming with ideas and energy. Change is happening in all fields, from science to sports, and from digital payments to conservation of water. Our sportspersons are winning medals and glory. India's Rupay payment card is being accepted more and more internationally. Through our Jal Jeevan Abhiyan, we are working to provide clean tap

water to every rural household in the country by 2024. Under this programme, we would be covering 146 million households. Our Ayushman Bharat health scheme, the largest of its kind in the world, is providing health benefits to 100 million families or approximately 500 million people. We are conscious that our growth and environment sustainability must go hand in hand. We are committed to sourcing 175 Giga Watts of electricity from renewable sources by 2022 and we are well on our way to achieving this goal. We are also looking at how we can learn from Iceland to tap geothermal energy. I invite you to be part of our transformative journey. You have an important role to play in forging technology, investment, tourism and cultural links and strengthening our ties with Iceland and the world.

10. We want to strengthen our bonds with our overseas community. We want to serve you better, be it delivery of passport or consular services. Our Embassies are geared to provide you round-the-clock service, so that no one in need is left unattended. We are utilizing social media and digital platforms such as MADAD to reach you. E-visas and OCI Card processes have been made simpler. We now offer e-visas to 169 countries with one year validity for tourism and business travel. They are also valid for medical purposes. In the last five years, we have rescued over 90,000 Indians as well as nationals of over 50 other countries caught in natural disasters or humanitarian situations overseas. As a result of these efforts, our people have a new confidence in the government.

11. I wish each one of you success. I hope you will continue to cherish your Indian roots and spread your warmth and friendship around. Please continue to carry India's timeless message of peace, harmony and fraternity to the world. And before I say good bye, I invite you to visit Rashtrapati Bhavan when you are in Delhi next. It may be my official residence but it belongs to all Indians. It would be a pleasure for us to welcome you. I thank you for joining us today.

Jai Hind!