

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND AT THE SWAZI PARLIAMENT

April 10, 2018

1. It is indeed a singular honour for me to address this august House. I am aware that I am the first foreign Head of State to have been accorded this privilege, and I would like to thank all the honourable Members of Parliament for their presence today.

2. Excellencies, to be a legislator of a country is a special responsibility. I have been one for twelve long years and I know the commitment and dedication it entails. All of you represent the collective voice of the proud Swazi people. You are the custodians of their welfare. Through your work in this House, you assist His Majesty the King not only in the day-to-day business of legislation and governance, but also in deliberating on the long-term policy orientations of the Kingdom. And I must say, you are doing very well.

3. Excellencies, we are living in a fast changing world. The demands on parliamentarians in a digital and hyper-connected globe are immense. Local day-to-day challenges of growth, progress and jobs are impacted by developments elsewhere, be it global food prices, Climate Change or security threats of various nature. Impact of globalization and technology, and soaring aspirations of people have added new dimensions to public policy. To legislate in such changing times demands even greater awareness and acumen. But with challenges come opportunities. Today, we see greater participation of people in debate and discussions. Legislators can have instant feedback on major issues of national and international concern. This augurs well for parliaments.

4. Given these common challenges, legislators from different countries can benefit significantly from sharing views with each other. Over the past seven decades of our Independence, India has developed a robust institutional architecture of Parliamentary democracy, and we would be happy to share this experience with this august House. To make a beginning in this regard, I

am happy to announce that we would offer concessional finance for constructing a new parliament building in Swaziland.

5. Excellencies, this is my first visit to the Kingdom, and I have been impressed with its natural beauty, its salubrious climate, its excellent infrastructure, and its friendly people. Your country enjoys a strategic location in south-eastern Africa, a part of the continent with which India has had historic connections. Not very far from here, Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our Nation, struggled and fought for justice. I am happy that his enduring legacy continues to inspire many here. Coming back to your advantages, the Kingdom is a member of many regional economic groupings. I see good potential for Indian investors to leverage these advantages, and use the Kingdom as a regional hub for manufacturing goods and services.

6. Excellencies, I am aware that while debating the Government's budget recently, this House had recognised the need to diversify the Swazi economy, to link it to new international value chains, to find new markets, and to leverage new sources of technology and finance. In all these areas, India can be a viable partner for Swaziland. Today, India is the fastest growing major economy in the world. India offers a reliable and growing market for your agricultural products and mineral resources.

7. Excellencies, Indian growth is fuelled by frugal innovation. Our technologies and institutional models can help reduce costs of production in Swaziland. We are keen to share our expertise and experience with you and, indeed, with the whole of African continent. On this score, our approach has been to create local capacities, to move hand in hand, in solidarity and in partnership with our African brothers and sisters. As Mahatma Gandhi said, and I quote- "*Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony*". –unquote.

8. Excellencies, both our countries have young populations. This is a source of strength for our countries. But it also challenges our lawmakers to create the policies that can equip our youngsters with the right skills and to create sufficient employment for them. That is why capacity-building and training are the most important ingredients of India's development assistance. I am

delighted to know that Swazi students and public officials have already been benefiting from the scholarships we offer.

9. Earlier today, I had the honour to inaugurate, along with His Majesty, the Information Technology Centre built with Indian assistance. As we work to enhance IT connect, we must also guard against cyber threats. India has, therefore, offered to finance the construction of a Disaster Recovery Site for providing data backup at your National Data Centre.

10. Excellencies, despite advances in new technologies, agriculture still remains the mainstay for majority of our populations. I was happy to know that India has already shared some of its experience with Swazi farmers. This has allowed them to achieve multiple-fold increase in maize-productivity. Taking our cooperation forward, I am happy that India will help establish a Centre of Agricultural Excellence in Swaziland for scaling up this success. I also take this opportunity to share with this august House that India has also decided to develop an irrigation system in the Lubuyane area.

11. Health is another area where India would like to expand our development collaboration with Swaziland. To showcase our commitment, I am happy that Indian entities have organized a free health camp in collaboration with your government during my visit. Your Excellencies would be aware that today India is the main source of affordable generic drugs including anti-retroviral drugs for fighting HIV. The Kingdom of Swaziland has made remarkable progress in slowing the spread of HIV. Excellencies, India stands ready to help the Kingdom in ensuring good health of its citizens.

12. Excellencies, Climate Change is one of the most critical problems facing our world today. I know that your Kingdom has itself struggled with El-Nino induced drought for two years. To support the Swaziland National Disaster Management Agency, we have decided to donate 1 million US dollars and food grains in kind. However, in the longer run, countering Climate Change requires coordinated efforts by all of us. Just last month, India hosted the first Summit of the International Solar Alliance, which aims to scale-up production of solar energy globally. We invite the Kingdom to join the Alliance as a partner country.

13. Excellencies, the greatest threat facing humanity today is terrorism. The Kingdom of Swaziland has been fortunate to not have suffered this scourge so far, but no country can afford to be negligent about its threat. India has long called for finalising a Comprehensive Convention Against International Terrorism, and we count upon the support of Swaziland for advancing this agenda. Moving from security to global governance, there is an urgent need to reform the UN Security Council and other multilateral institutions. Let us work to bring new vigour in them.

14. Finally, Excellencies, please accept my thanks and appreciation once again for this unique opportunity to address you all. Swaziland and India are countries deeply attached to our traditions and cultures. In both our Parliaments, our legislators try to strike a delicate balance between adoption of modern practices and preservation of our traditional practices. We should be proud of this commonality. I wish you all the best for the coming Parliamentary elections.

15. Thank you. Ngiyabonga!
