

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,  
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND ON THE TOPIC: INDIA-  
ICELAND FOR A GREENER PLANET**

**Reykjavik, September 10, 2019**

1. I am delighted to visit Iceland. It is a country of warm people and spectacular landscapes. It is a country where society lives in harmony with nature. And it is a country with which India has a very special friendship.

2. Our two countries share many facets. We both are deeply connected to nature. We both take pride in our democracy and in our ancient cultural traditions. Your lava plains and our basaltic Deccan Trap have the same genesis. We, therefore, belong to the same geological family as well!

3. I thank the Rector of the University for inviting me to speak with you. This esteemed University has given leadership and intellectual guidance to your democratic polity. Your President and Prime Minister have studied here and so have several other leaders. Mr. Olafur Grimsson, former President and a great friend of India, taught at this University. As students you are, indeed, proud inheritors of a rich legacy. And I am sure you will enrich it further.

Ladies and gentlemen,

4. Iceland has embraced nature like none other. It has shown unparalleled compassion to nurture it. I have, therefore, as a tribute to your commitment, chosen to speak on the theme: "India-Iceland for a Greener Planet". Mother Earth today is under stress. Climate Change and environmental degradation pose a huge challenge to life. The beautiful glaciers that dominate this wonderful land are receding. I have been told that Iceland loses 40 square kilometers of glacial cover annually. In my own country, we are facing rapid melting of snow on the Himalayan peaks. This threatens not just our ecosystem but our complete way of life. I grew up on the banks of River Ganga in my native Kanpur. Rivers are sacred to us. They are

intimately connected to our culture, our religion and our social life. It was, therefore, natural for me, as with others in India and elsewhere, to develop a deep sense of reverence and respect for them.

5. In the year 1972, it had been just over a year that I passed out of University. This was the time of the landmark United Nations Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm - which brought environment to the centre of global discourse. Around the same time, we had a people's movement, CHIPKO ANDOLAN, in India, to save our trees and preserve our mountain ecology. The form of the movement was that people would embrace a tree and sit there in protest day-in and day-out to stop felling of trees. It was a unique expression of love for nature. A decade before that, Rachel Carson's book on environment - Silent Spring- had warned us of limitless exploitation of nature.

6. At that time Climate Change was not seen as one of the most pressing concerns. But we have come a long way since. Today, we have an increasing number of global forums where we are discussing environment protection, biodiversity conservation, carbon sinks and green growth. And yet, despite extensive knowledge on the subject, we are witness to rapidly melting glaciers and ice caps, extreme weather events, depleting marine resources, receding forests and shrinking of biodiversity. We are also equally aware of the enormous socio-economic implications of Climate Change, especially for the poor. Clearly, increase in knowledge and availability of scientific evidence have not led to adequate practical action to deal with Climate Change and environmental degradation.

7. But we are on course. And Iceland is showing us the way. As a country, you have moved away from importing fossil fuels for electricity generation to producing 100 percent of energy from renewable sources. And all this has happened in a span of a few decades. What does it tell us? Clearly and emphatically that development and environment protection can go hand in hand. Through commitment and compassion; through technology and

timely action; and through clean energy pathways and change in consumption patterns, we can make a difference.

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. Iceland's green growth is a remarkable story. You are pioneers in energy and resource efficiency. Your people have found new ways to work with available resources and then innovatively scale them up too. I am informed that in 1907 a farmer ran a pipe from a hot-spring to his farm to provide steam to his house. That idea, today, has led to geothermal energy revolution, heating 90 per cent of houses in Iceland.

9. The manner in which Iceland has pursued development in its fishery sector, after collapse of its fish-stock in the 1970s, is worthy of emulation. India and the world can benefit from Iceland's expertise in sustainable fishing and fabrication of fishing fleet. Your waste-to-wealth approach in converting fish skin into leather and cosmetics also opens a whole new world of opportunities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. To make the Earth Greener is a global challenge; it requires a global response. There can no longer be a path to development that does not factor in environmental considerations. We are deeply conscious of it. India is now the world's fastest growing major economy and we require a huge expansion of our energy production. But we are doing it in a sustainable manner. Even as we grow, we are on course to meet our commitments under the Paris Agreement.

11. India's greenhouse gas emission intensity of its GDP will be reduced by 33 to 35 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. We will be creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of Carbon Dioxide equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030. We have set ourselves a target of installing 175 Giga Watts of renewable energy capacity by the year 2022, and a target of meeting 40 percent of the total energy from non-fossil sources by the year 2030. In our ever-growing commitment to renewable

energy, we will be turning towards utilization of geothermal energy also. We look forward to working with Iceland in this regard.

12. India has pledged to eliminate single-use plastic by 2022. We have an ambitious target to put 6 to 7 million hybrid and electric vehicles on the road by 2020. Under our national scheme UJALA, we have distributed 358 million LED bulbs reducing 37 million tonnes of carbon dioxide release in the atmosphere. Our UJJWALA programme has provided 79 million clean cooking gas connections to women from poor households. This has freed rural women from the misery of toxic smoke and eliminated their dependence on firewood. Importantly, it has had a positive impact on the environment. We have taken huge steps to protect our forest cover and wildlife. India's forest cover has increased by 1 per cent in the last five years. Our tiger population has risen 30 percent in the last four years and now stands at 2967. Our Clean India Mission is also yielding positive results for the environment. To conserve water and ensure piped water availability across the country, we have undertaken an ambitious national water programme. It would nourish our ecology and habitat, while quenching the thirst of millions.

13. In the last few years, India has taken several steps to work with the international community to combat the effects of climate change. And as I speak, we are hosting the 14th UN Convention to Combat Desertification in India from 2-13 September 2019. India took the initiative to launch the International Solar Alliance at the Paris Summit to enhance global action on climate change. We look forward to Iceland joining this initiative soon.

Ladies and gentlemen,

14. India's ancient books, from the Vedas to the Upanishads, have left us an enormous repository of knowledge and wisdom. They are guiding us to live in harmony with nature. Each year, we celebrate green festival with plantation drives involving the community and students in our President Estate. On my State Visits abroad also, I have planted trees, from Madagascar to Myanmar and from Suriname to Vietnam to share my compassion and

concern for the environment and to contribute to preserve our heritage and habitat.

15. This year we are celebrating the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. He was an environmentalist to the core. For him every drop of water was precious. As a practice, he would always take half-a-glass of water at a time and more when needed. His habit was a simple one, but with a deeper message. Hope it would encourage us all to make our life more sustainable.

Dear Students,

16. You are the future leaders of our planet. You have both the knowledge and the drive to create new pathways for a greener future. The exuberance that powered the first, second and third industrial revolutions, needs to be harnessed to lead the fourth revolution. This will be driven by greener technologies, clean sources of energy and circular economy. And you will be at the forefront of all such efforts. We want our future generations to see the icy landscape that gave this beautiful country its name. Let Okjokull be the last glacier we lose to a warming planet, and in that spirit, I call upon you to help move not just Iceland and India, but the entire planet, towards a greener tomorrow. I wish you a bright future ahead.

Takk Firir!  
Thank you!