

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF INAUGURATION OF THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON DHARMA-DHAMMA**

Rajgir: January 11, 2018

1. I am happy to be here for the inauguration of the “**International Conference on State and Social Order in Dharma-Dhamma Traditions**” being organised by **Nalanda University** in partnership with the **Vietnam Buddhist University, India Foundation**, and the **Ministry of External Affairs**, government of India. In particular, I must welcome the international scholars and delegates, from 11 countries, who have arrived here for this conference.
2. I understand this is the fourth International Dharma-Dhamma Conference but the first to be hosted by Nalanda University and in the state of Bihar. In a sense, the twin traditions of Dharma and Dhamma have come home. They have come home to the sacred soil of this ancient land of faith, wisdom and enlightenment – this land of Lord Buddha.
3. In the period of Lord Buddha, well before modern states and state boundaries, this entire region was known as Magadha. In those times, Sanskrit and Pali were the principal languages of communication. Dharma is a Sanskrit word and Dhamma is a Pali word. Their meaning is the same and they have the same root. While travelling through the Magadha region, Lord Buddha and his disciples rested in camps that grew into monasteries. These were called **viharas**. And from the word **vihara**, we get the name of Bihar.
4. Aside from the location, the timing of this conference is very appropriate. We are marking the 25th anniversary of the ASEAN-

India Dialogue Partnership. The month of January is a celebration of India-ASEAN relations. This year on India's Republic Day, January 26, leaders from all 10 ASEAN countries will be guests of honour at the ceremonial events in New Delhi. And today this conference stands testimony to the abiding friendship and shared values of India and ASEAN – as well as to the spiritual heritage and knowledge that belongs to both the sub-continent and to Southeast Asia.

5. This conference is an attempt at enhancing understanding of the common roots and similarities of the diverse traditions of Dharma and Dhamma. We know them by many names, but they guide us to the same truth. They emphasise the many roads, rather than any one road, that lead us to the same desired goal. The deliberations at this conference will explore that essential truth. They will discuss and debate the role of Dharma and Dhamma in shaping ethical conduct and purposeful statecraft. These themes are universal and eternal. They have survived long periods of external challenge and of self-doubt. And they have shown a remarkable resilience through human history.
6. Nalanda University itself is an embodiment of this spirit. The ancient university that stood here was a marvel of knowledge and wisdom. It was located in this very region of India but had an international character. It attracted students, scholars and pilgrims from all over Asia. Similarly today's Nalanda University represents the ever-lasting Dharma-Dhamma identity. And it too is a cosmopolitan enterprise. The university's conceptualisation, founding and growth are the result of cherished efforts by India and a host of partner countries, particularly countries from the ASEAN family.
7. Along with several Indian scholars, I am told this conference will hear the wise words of eminent international delegates. They have come from far-off continents, including both North and South America. But most of all, they represent the breadth and diversity of Asia – from Central Asia to Southeast Asia. Each of the

countries and societies represented at this conference is unique and has special attributes. Yet, all of them are recipients, in some manner, of the Dharma-Dhamma tradition. All of them have received the message of Lord Buddha – a message that has travelled across Asia and beyond, and a message that is a binding force for all of us.

8. That journey of Buddhism as a pan-Asian creed and later a worldwide following began 2,500 years ago right here in Bihar. As such, the conference is a commemoration of a great phenomenon that has its origins right here in this region.
9. That voyage of Buddhism to the rest of the Asian continent carried more than just the Dharma-Dhamma tradition. It carried a rich cargo of knowledge and learning. It carried arts and crafts. It carried meditation techniques and even martial arts. Eventually, the many roads that the determined monks and nuns - those men and women of faith - carved out came to carry both culture and commerce. They became among the earliest transcontinental trade routes.
10. Long before the term became popular, Buddhism was the basis for an early form of globalisation – and of interconnectedness in our continent. It promoted pluralism and diversity of thought. It gave space to multiple ideas and liberal expression. It emphasised morality in individual life, in human partnerships and in social and economic transactions. It urged principles of living, working and cooperating in harmony with nature and the environment. It inspired trade and business links that were honest, transparent and mutually beneficial to sister communities.
11. At the simplest level, the Dharma-Dhamma tradition tells us of the need and the importance for constant striving to improve oneself – to attain a higher calling and to reach a stage of enlightenment. It was the reaching of this enlightenment that led Prince Siddhartha to become Lord Buddha. Or for Ashoka, the warrior king, to become Dhamma Ashoka.

12. Anyone who has been touched by Lord Buddha has embraced a process of ceaseless and constant striving to become a better person as well as a more enlightened person. And a person who has tried to rise above material ambitions and acquisitiveness. This is true for human beings, but it also applies to societies and nations. We must all appreciate the Dharma or the Dhamma of contentment.
13. It is estimated that more than half the world's current population lives in regions that have been historically influenced – and in many cases continue to be influenced – by the enlightenment that Lord Buddha attained and placed as a model before humanity. This is the thread that stitches us all together. This is the vision that must inspire us in the 21st century as well. And this is truly what has been described as the **Light of Asia**.

Ladies and Gentlemen

14. India's Act East Policy has to be seen in this context. It is much more than a diplomatic initiative. It is not targeted at just greater trade and investment. Of course all of those aspirations are extremely important for the prosperity and well-being of the people of India and of all our partner countries. Yet, the Act East Policy aims at sharing not merely economic opportunities – but at an integration of the dreams and hopes of the hundreds of millions who live in India and in Southeast Asia. And in other parts of Asia that are covered by the Dharma-Dhamma footprint. Our past has a common source – inevitably, our destiny too is linked. This conference and the new Nalanda University are symbols of that spirit we share. Our economic and diplomatic endeavours must draw from the same well-spring.
15. For the states of India's Northeast and east – states such as Bihar – the spiritual, cultural and trade links that were so lovingly created by the monks of Dharma and Dhamma hundreds and thousands of years ago are much more than a historical memory. They are wired into society's DNA. They are a living reality that

makes Southeast Asia a natural and irreplaceable partner in the quest for development and prosperity, for peace and pluralism, at home and across our majestic continent. And as such, for all of us here and in any area of human activity, Dharma and Dhamma are both a continuous, eternal journey – and a destination.

16. With these words, I am happy to declare the **fourth International Dharma-Dhamma Conference** open. I wish all of you the very best for the rest of the proceedings.

Thank you
Jai Hind!