

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND AT THE MAHATMA GANDHI INSTITUTE,
MAURITIUS**

March 11, 2018

1. I am honoured to be in Mauritius for a milestone moment in your country's history – the 50th anniversary of independence from colonial rule. Tomorrow, March 12, marks not just the golden jubilee of the independence of Mauritius but also the 26th anniversary of this nation of such spectacular beauty having become a republic. This is my second state visit after assuming office as the President of India. It is not without reason that both my visits have been to Africa. This is a special continent for us in India, and Mauritius is a special country. Right from the moment I landed, I have been overwhelmed by your affection. The reception at the airport was magical. The Prime Minister and the members of his Cabinet – along with hundreds of smiling citizens of your country – were there to welcome us and make us comfortable. My brief interaction with your President and Prime Minister has left me experiencing warmth that can come only when one is among close friends.
2. On behalf of the Republic of India, I congratulate the people and the government of Mauritius. The euphoria and pride I am seeing here brings back memories of August 15, 2017, when we in India celebrated the 70th anniversary of our Independence. Truly, I am feeling at home in Mauritius. Thank you so much.
3. Many of you have an ancestral link with India. The first people from India arrived in Mauritius 200 years ago, in the 1820s. In 1834, the first indentured labourers from India reached these shores. From those early challenges, the Indian community has come a long way. It has contributed, along with its fellow citizens of diverse backgrounds, to making Mauritius a prosperous country and a model for this region. As a steadfast friend, India has been proud to support your efforts. I must add that it is not just the past that

unites us. We have a shared destiny and a shared future. Above all, we cherish the same values – of freedom and transparency, of democracy and human dignity.

4. These values have inspired us through a common struggle against colonial rule. They have inspired us through the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. And it is a fitting tribute to Bapu that my first public event in Mauritius is in this institute named after him. In 1901, while travelling by ship from South Africa to India, Mahatma Gandhi visited Mauritius. Six years later, he urged the barrister Manilal Doctor to travel to Mauritius and organise the Indian community. Those were the beginnings of the struggle for political and social liberty.
5. My visit to Mauritius is the latest in a long series of bilateral journeys. My predecessor, President Pranab Mukerjee, was here in 2013. And our Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, came to Mauritius in March 2015. In May 2017, Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth paid a state visit to India. It was his first visit abroad since assuming office as Prime Minister of Mauritius, and another indicator of the closeness of our relations. Our diplomatic and business calendar has been extremely busy, but I must make special mention of two recent engagements.
6. In February 2018, only a few weeks ago, Mauritius was a partner nation at the Uttar Pradesh Investor Summit, the premier business and investor summit in India's most populous state – a state to which many of you can trace family origins. And as it happens, the state I too was born in. At the valedictory function, I was very happy to share the dais with Sir Anerood Jugnauth, Minister Mentor and Minister of Defence.
7. My second reference is to the International Solar Alliance, a key initiative of the Government of India and many partner countries to promote renewable energy, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and take on the shared threat of climate change. The inaugural ISA summit formally began in New Delhi last evening with a

banquet I hosted at Rashtrapati Bhavan. And where I was glad to meet the Deputy Prime Minister of Mauritius.

Ladies and Gentlemen

8. India is today the world's fastest-growing large economy. The energy that is driving India's economic growth, as well as the outcomes of that growth, are reshaping aspirations domestically and reconfiguring India's role internationally.
9. The new dynamism in India is evident in four broad areas – in its rising economy; in the adoption and embracing of technology for a host of business, social and citizen-friendly initiatives; in the increasing economic autonomy and emergence of India's states; and finally, in the sense of aspiration and opportunity that is influencing our young people and pushing them to strive harder and aim higher.
10. India's confident march towards a 21st century economy combines modern manufacturing, under the Make in India programme, with the use of digital platforms to create unprecedented business opportunities. The Digital India mission is taking Internet and data connectivity to the interiors of rural India. At the other end of the spectrum, India is a buzzing hub of technology start-ups. This sector, among others, has made India an attractive destination for investment. There has been a sharp rise in FDI in the past three years – from US\$ 36 billion in 2013-14 to US\$ 60 billion in 2016-17.
11. India is attempting to become the first major country to industrialise while simultaneously reducing its energy intensity and the role of carbon-based fuels. By March 2022, five years from now, India has targeted a combined solar and wind energy capacity of 175 giga watts. This goal is in keeping with our commitment to not just a more prosperous world but also a more sustainable world. It presents the Indian developmental model as ecology-friendly and planet-friendly – and as a template for other emerging economies.

12. The challenge before us is to modernise our society and economy without succumbing to an extractive and energy-guzzling model. India is making every effort to meet this challenge – but this challenge is not India's alone. It is the challenge of every country and every global citizen. As an island nation, Mauritius is of course extremely conscious of this challenge.
13. In this endeavour, as in many others, technology is proving to be a force multiplier for India. For example, India is urbanising at a faster rate than ever in its history. Under our Smart Cities programme, new cities are being built and existing urban centres are being renewed and upgraded. Technology is helping improve sanitation and waste management, recycle water and expand power and data connectivity. It is also making movement easier for commuters by way of electric buses and metro rail lines.
14. On the other hand, our farmers are harvesting the benefits of technologies that are helping them understand the composition of the soil in their specific holdings, and the precise nutrients that such soil needs. Drip irrigation and similar innovations are supporting our farmers in enhancing productivity of, for instance, sugarcane while reducing the use of water.
15. And much of the exciting work in such areas is now being done by India's states – 29 vibrant and increasingly viable economies. Our states today have the policy space and the fiscal means to structure developmental programmes as per their local priorities. There is enormous scope for partnerships between Mauritius and several of our states. A few minutes ago I had mentioned the participation of a Mauritius delegation at the Uttar Pradesh Investor Summit, but frankly there are many other avenues as well. Developmental and economic experiences – in agriculture and dairy farming, tourism and textiles, coastal zoning and urbanisation, and skilling and education – can be shared between Mauritius and individual states of India.
16. The Indian community here comprises those who trace their roots to a variety of Indian states, from Bihar to Tamil Nadu to

Gujarat to several others. I would urge you all to plug into networks in your respective ancestral states and regions and connect these with the developmental process here. Please become even more of a living bridge between Mauritius and India, and Mauritius and the states of India. There is much we can learn from each other. I must say here that your sanitation record is extremely impressive and Swachh Mauritius is in many ways a model for Swacch Bharat, the Clean India programme that is making rapid progress.

17. Like in the case of Mauritius, India's great strength is its young people. Some say that the sense of optimism in today's India matches the sentiment in the immediate aftermath of Independence in 1947. There is a wave of entrepreneurship, even at the bottom of the pyramid, with ordinary persons using a mobile phone, a creative idea, and a small room or a patch of green to set up their own little enterprise. It could be as simple as making pickles and jams from home-grown fruits and vegetables – and exploring a larger market as part of the food value chain. This spirit of hope and adventure is energising Indian aspirations. It is a spirit that we want to bring to the world. It is a spirit that we would love to share with our brothers and sisters in Mauritius.

Friends

18. Our affection and feeling for Mauritius is symbolic of our shared aspirations for Africa and for the Indian Ocean Region. Above all else, it is our people who bring us together. Mauritius is one of the largest participating countries in the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme. Over 300 young people from here undergo civilian and defence related training in India each year. Under India's Africa Scholarships programme – part of the India Africa Forum Summit initiative – each year 97 scholarships are offered to Mauritian students for higher education. Another 200 students enrol themselves in Indian universities on a self-financing basis. They come to India as cherished friends. I like to believe we send them back as ambassadors of India – and life-long believers in our partnership.

19. The social housing project and the ENT hospital that I will be laying the foundation stones of, as well as the construction of the metro rail, are only an indication of what India and Mauritius can do together. India's vision for the Indian Ocean Region is to cooperate in developmental programmes that are sustainable, mutually-beneficial and contribute to employment and well-being in the local community. This is the age of connectivity and of the blue economy – of using the waters and resources of our ocean intelligently and humanely for uniting cultures and peoples in a collaborative manner. It is also about building institutions and platforms to anticipate and prepare for common challenges, whether related to security or to humanitarian disasters.

20. In all of these, Mauritius, as the location of the headquarters of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, has a critical role. India sees Mauritius as central to the emerging institutional architecture of the Indian Ocean Region – and we want to sail together, and sail far, in these majestic waters. Our aspiration is for Mauritius to rise as a leading economy and a voice for peace and stability in the entire Indian Ocean Region.

21. With those words, and with the confidence that the best is ahead of us, I once more congratulate all of you on the 50th anniversary of your country's independence. And I thank you again for this warm welcome.