

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND,
AT THE BANQUET HOSTED BY PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC
OF MAURITIUS**

11 March 2018

Let me first express my profound gratitude to the Government of Mauritius for inviting me as the Chief Guest for the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Independence of Mauritius.

2. This is a distinct honour for the 1.3 billion people of India. I also convey my sincere thanks for the exceptionally warm welcome and gracious hospitality accorded to me and my delegation. I was received with much warmth and affection at the airport and thereafter at the State House and at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute.

3. India-Mauritius relations are very special. We have ancestral and familial links going back in time and as much in the present. Thousands of Indians arrived in Mauritius during the French period, as traders, priests and craftsmen. In the 19th and early 20th century, over 450,000 Indians arrived in Mauritius as indentured labourers from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Still others came from Maharashtra, Gujarat and other parts of India. The Indo-Mauritians, together with the Creoles, Sino-Mauritians and Franco-Mauritians, have contributed immensely to the spectacular economic growth and well-being of this country. They have each added their vibrancy and colour to this beautiful rainbow nation, what many and most call a heaven on Earth. They have also maintained their traditions and kept their culture alive for over 200 years, in a faraway land, away from their roots and away from India.

4. Based on these secure foundations and on shared values of democracy and tolerance, our relations have grown and developed steadily over the years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. Few events in a nation's history warrant greater remembrance, tribute and celebration than the commemoration of its Independence.

6. Today, my thoughts go back to 1947, when India won her freedom, after a prolonged and valiant struggle. It was a day of fulfillment and a new beginning for us. Today, on the eve of the 12th of March, your Independence Day, I am overcome by the very same emotions, since it was our own people, our very own brothers and sisters, who won freedom in Mauritius.

7. Your Independence movement and our own Freedom Struggle have inspired and drawn strength and vitality from each other. 12th March was the day Mahatma Gandhi embarked on his historic Dandi Yatra, or Salt March, in 1930 to defy the colonial rule. His visit to Mauritius at the turn of the last century made him think deep about the welfare of Indians in this country. We feel ever privileged to have stood by you, when you needed us most.

8. Excellency, spirituality and Indian way of life and celebrations can hardly be separated from each other. It is a happy coincidence then that we are remembering your freedom and sacrifice in this hall named after Swami Vivekananda, the great Indian spiritual leader. His message of compassion and freedom from fear remains universally relevant, and more so on such occasions.

9. On this emotional occasion, I pay tribute to successive generations of Mauritian leaders, who secured freedom and rapid economic growth for their people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. From the days of supporting your social and political emancipation, to assisting major projects of priority to you today, India has always been on your side.

11. We feel privileged to work with Mauritius for the development and prosperity of all sections of its society, for the whole of Mauritius. In the spirit of '*Lamain dans Lamain*', the theme of the 50th anniversary of your Independence, let me reassure you that India will walk hand in hand, in step and in harmony, together with Mauritius.

12. Excellency, your landmark visit to India in May 2017 was a milestone in our relations. You have been a great supporter of our development partnership. We are privileged to be giving you a helping hand in implementing a range of trans-formational projects, ranging from the Metro Express, Social Housing, ENT Hospital to the new World Hindi Secretariat premises and infrastructure development in Agalega.

13. It is equally our endeavour to foster closer people-to-people ties. Since last year, all Mauritians of Indian descent or those married to them became eligible for overseas Indian citizenship under an exclusive provision in our OCI card scheme. In 2016, India and Mauritius helped each other in gaining UNESCO's recognition for the Bhojpuri 'Geet Gawai' and for Yoga as in-tangible heritage of humanity.

Excellency,

14. Mauritius is a gateway to the Indian Ocean region and to Africa. It can serve as a hub for Indian companies looking to reach out to mainland Africa. As the proverbial Star and Key of the Indian Ocean, Mauritius has a natural convergence of interests with India. Our cooperation in maritime security and counter-terrorism has been exemplary.

Excellency,

15. We see in Mauritius a trusted partner in realizing our shared vision of stability, peace and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region. We look forward to working with you ever more closely. I also take this opportunity to congratulate all citizens of Mauritius on the golden jubilee of their Independence and wish them peace and prosperity.

16. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, may I now invite you to join me in raising a toast:

- To the health and well-being of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius and Mrs. Kobita Jugnauth;
- To the continued success, prosperity and happiness of the Mauritian people; and
- To the enduring and ever-lasting friendship between India and Mauritius.

Thank You.
