

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND AT THE COMMUNITY RECEPTION, ANTANANARIVO

14 March 2018

Thank you for your warm and special welcome. I am extremely delighted to meet you. I am accompanied by a delegation comprising Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare Shri Ashwini Choubey and four Members of Parliament.

2. I consider it a special honour to be the first Indian President to visit this ancient country. I had meaningful talks with President Hery this afternoon. We both expressed deep commitment to impart new vigour and energy to India-Madagascar relations. I am hopeful that my visit will mark a new chapter in our warm and friendly ties with Madagascar.

Friends,

3. As we embark on a new journey in Madagascar, you as members of the Indian community have an important role to play in enhancing and building our ties with the Malagasy people. Both India and Madagascar have gone through similar political and socio-economic trajectories and we have much to share and learn from each other.

4. India has age-old maritime and cultural links with Madagascar. But the real impulse for our togetherness with this beautiful and diverse country came, when your ancestors arrived here in the 18th century and thereafter. They came as traders and merchants, as entrepreneurs and pioneers, from Gujarat, Punjab and other parts of India. They carried to this promising land

Indian business acumen, hard work and most importantly, the will to succeed. I must say you have dutifully preserved and continue to display those basic values in your work and in your social obligations.

Friends,

5. In this gathering, we have many proud descendants of those early migrants who braved the odds and made this country their home. Their success reminds me of a famous Malagasy proverb and I quote – *“People are like plants in the wind, they bow down and rise up again”*. – Unquote. We also have among you young professionals and entrepreneurs from India, who today have become the drivers of technology and change the world over.

Friends,

6. On the strong foundation of your Indian values and family structure, you have prospered and done very well for yourself. And in the process you have created jobs and new opportunities for your host society. You have indeed lent a helping hand in nation building in this country. I am happy that many of you have followed the motto “Live Not for Self Alone”. I commend the philanthropic activities undertaken by members of the Indian community to help the needy and poor. These create not just goodwill for yourself but also for the land of your fore-fathers. Needless to say, we take much pride in your success and in your kindness.

7. I am delighted that living far-away from your motherland, you have kept your tradition and culture alive. And not just that, you have also splashed your colours and shared your delights with your Malagasy friends.

Friends,

8. India is proud of its Diaspora and their achievements. You are true Ambassadors of India as you nurture and maintain your Indianness among the traditions of your adopted home. I am told that you do visit India for cultural and emotional reasons. But you need to connect with us much more than before; as tourists, as traders or just simply to connect with your roots.

9. Our government has taken several initiatives for engaging the Diaspora around the world. The objective behind these is to help you stay connected with India and be part of its growth story. We are the fastest growing major economy in the world today. You must plug into the changes happening in India. These would help create new values not just for yourself but also for India-Madagascar relations. There is huge potential for investment and trade between the two countries, where I am sure, you would want to play a role.

10. It is also important that your children and the young ones connect with the youth in India. In the digital age, new cross-cultural and cross-continent networks are being created. Ideas, innovation and start-ups are the new drivers of change. Our Government runs a special programme – the Know India Programme- to bring our diaspora youths together and expose them to India. You must take advantage of it. You should similarly connect with diaspora networks in India and in other parts of the world. We have created a new facility- the Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra- in New Delhi as a one stop resource center for our diaspora. You should collaborate with them. It is your home in India and you need to take lead to build and strengthen it.

11. I am told we have almost 18,000 strong Indian community in Madagascar. Yet, not many have taken advantage of our OCI scheme. I encourage you to come forward and seek its benefits.

Friends,

12. We have among us a number of young Malagasy friends who have benefited from our training and scholarship. I learn that the ITEC Friendship Society in Antananarivo is very active in philanthropic activities and in spreading awareness about India in Madagascar. I extend my warm felicitations for their laudable efforts.

13. We are committed to provide more capacity building assistance and to develop new skills in this country. As members of the Indian Diaspora, you should also energize the youth here and help them find their hidden potential.

14. Friends, as we make a new beginning in our ties with Madagascar, I urge each one of you to play an active role in it. Let us join hands together.

15. With these words, I thank you for being here. I extend my best wishes to each one of you for your health, progress and many proud achievements.

Thank You.