

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ANTANANARIVO**

Madagascar, March 15, 2018

1. Good morning to all of you. I am honoured to be here among the students, faculty and academic community of the University of Antananarivo, which I am told is the leading institution of higher learning in Madagascar. This is my first visit to Madagascar. Indeed, I am privileged to be the first President of India to visit this beautiful country.
2. The distance between Madagascar and India may seem wide – but in many senses we are neighbours. The waters of the Indian Ocean wash both our shores. The hopes and opportunities, concerns and challenges of this mighty ocean make us obvious partners. As per the International Seabed Authority, the undersea exploration zones of our countries are closest to each other.
3. Aside from geography, geology also connects us. Over 100 million years ago India and Madagascar were part of the same super-continent of Gondwana. As the continental drift occurred, the super-continent broke up and gradually, over thousands of years, Madagascar and India moved in separate directions. Yet, somewhere deep in our ancient rocks and soils, we are still cousins. We are both children of Gondwana.
4. In the 18th century the first Indian migrants reached Madagascar. They received a generous welcome in this warm and hospitable land that – much like India I should add – is proud of its multiethnic character and pluralism. Today, the Madagascar-India relationship draws from a history of shared experiences. Our common goal of a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable world has led to our countries supporting each other in bilateral and multilateral forums. Only this past weekend, on March 10 and 11, Madagascar was a distinguished participant at the first summit of the International Solar Alliance in New Delhi. We are deeply appreciative of Madagascar's entry into the ISA. This is an international

organisation based in India but with stakeholders across the world, especially here in Madagascar.

5. As an island nation, you understand better than most the risks of climate change and the need to move away from fossil fuels towards renewable and particularly solar energy. As an ISA member state Madagascar will be accessing a solar grant pilot project to be commissioned by India's National Institute of Solar Energy.

Ladies and Gentlemen

6. Madagascar and India are both young countries, with a determination and drive to change our destinies. One of the reasons I am here at this university is because I was very keen to interact with the youth of Madagascar – a country where 60 per cent of the population is below the age of 25. India's demographic profile is very similar – 65 per cent of our people are under the age of 35. Young people in both our countries see the same dreams. We need to work together to make them – to make all of you – realise those dreams. We need to work together for India to help Madagascar in its developmental process – as per your country's priorities.
7. It is fitting that at the base of the Madagascar-India relationship is education cooperation. India offers higher-education scholarships to Malagasy students under various heads – including the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme, the India Africa Forum Summit initiative, and the C.V. Raman Fellowship, named after the first Indian scientist to win a Nobel Prize. So far 355 Malagasy boys and girls have availed these scholarships. We look forward to welcoming many, many more.
8. The youth of Madagascar are the future of this country. And along with the youth of India they will help build a better world for the 21st century. I would like to emphasise that you will always enjoy a warm welcome in India, whether you come as students or tourists or for business. India is teeming with opportunities but those

opportunities are not for us alone. We would want to make you a part of those opportunities.

9. I am glad to note that hundreds of students from here have used the Pan-African e-Network Project, which started in 2010. The Government of India is in the process of upgrading this network so that more and more students, in Madagascar and across Africa, can benefit from online courses.
10. As important as education is public health. Here too Madagascar will continue to find India a willing partner. An increasing number of health professionals from Madagascar are participating in capacity-building programmes being offered by Indian medical institutions. Tele-medicine facilities are also being offered in collaboration with the Institute Médicale de Madagascar. Since 2010, top hospitals in India have been using this mechanism to provide free diagnosis to patients in Madagascar.
11. Both Madagascar and India are farming societies, with vast, fertile fields and hard-working farmers. It stands to reason that research in agriculture and the desire to help our farmers enhance productivity and incomes will bring us together. During my visit here, it has been my privilege to inaugurate the Centre for Geoinformatics Applications in Rural Development. This Centre is a tribute to our bilateral ties and will allow communities in Madagascar to use geospatial technologies for a host of applications in rural development.
12. Only a few weeks ago, in February 2018, the meeting of our Joint Agriculture Working Group was held in Antananarivo. Soil testing laboratories built with Indian support are helping farmers in Madagascar understand the needs and properties of their soil, and the specific nutrients that are required.
13. India is also helping construct a fertiliser plant in Madagascar that I am confident will be up and running soon. Related cooperation projects will serve to improve irrigation and enhance rice productivity and food safety, among other endeavours. There

is much more we can do together. From fighting soil erosion to helping farmers move into food processing, there is a whole range of experiences that we in India would love to share.

14. Both Madagascar and India are endowed with precious natural and mineral resources. It is important that these are managed and developed in a sustainable and eco-friendly manner that brings jobs, benefits and prosperity to the local community. Here too India would be happy to support Madagascar's efforts.
15. Our primary shared resource is, of course, the ocean – a vast expanse of water that holds within it many riches, much hope and sometimes hidden challenges as well. We need to explore the sea and we need to help fishing communities here in Madagascar. In parallel, we need to ensure maritime security and guard against environmental degradation. Above all, we need to be prepared for humanitarian disasters and the unpredictable moods of the ocean. Malagasy and Indian Navies are close partners and Indian ships have made several friendly visits to Madagascar. I would particularly like to recall the visit of our ship INS Trikand in 2016. During its short stay, I am glad that the ship and its crew were able to support the relief efforts following a bush fire disaster in the Diana region – and to that extent help the people of Madagascar.

Friends

16. With this event, I am concluding my visit to Madagascar and returning home to India. I am leaving with happy memories and warm emotions of the hospitality and affection I have received. This has convinced me even more that Madagascar and India can do, must do and will do much together. Your beautiful country, a land of such spectacular and unique flora and fauna, has enormous tourism potential. The Indian tourism industry can support in harnessing this potential. And outbound Indian tourists, now a significant slice of global travellers, are no doubt looking forward to visiting your wonderful country in larger numbers.
17. I go back with the hope that my journey will herald many more journeys between our countries and our people. I go back

with the fragrance of Madagascar's vanilla and the aroma of your coffee. I go back with the belief that the baobab tree and the neem tree will together give us the comfort of their shade. And I go back secure in the knowledge that Madagascar and India are friends forever.

18. As I leave, I cannot forget to convey my best wishes to all the young people in this university. I wish you all success as you complete your education and strive to realise your dreams. India will do whatever it takes to help you realise those dreams. And as I said earlier, all of you are always welcome to India.

Thank you. And God bless you all.