

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,  
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
AT THE INAUGURAL FUNCTION OF THE DIAMOND JUBILEE  
CELEBRATIONS OF INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE**

**New Delhi, April 18, 2022**

It is my pleasure to be here among you for the inaugural function of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of the IIC. Our capital has a long-standing tradition of rich cultural exchanges, which the IIC has been enriching for the past six decades.

When the idea of the IIC was conceived in 1958 as an international platform for exchange of views, the world was coping with issues concerning a fair and stable international order and legacy-burdens of two world wars. The process of de-colonisation was underway in Asia and Africa, with new aspirations influencing the emerging international order. As the contemporary world is going through a phase of transition, forums like the IIC become all the more relevant.

The decades immediately after the Independence of our country were marked by new institutions that included the IIC. Several eminent persons such as Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, John D. Rockefeller, Dr. C.D. Deshmukh, and Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya helped actualise that vision. Crown Prince Akihito of Japan laid the cornerstone for the building in November 1960, underlining the institution's international character. It is also a happy coincidence that the Centre's Diamond Jubilee and completion of 70 years of India-Japan diplomatic relations are happening this year.

The IIC's international character also found a beautiful expression in the design of its building. Architect Joseph Allen Stein had designed several famous buildings in the capital, but the IIC, in the vicinity of Lodhi Gardens, commands a unique significance.

The founding of this institution was done by women and men with a vision of India's future and its role in a world of international cooperation. The IIC stands for a vision of India as a vibrant democracy where it is possible to initiate dialogue in an atmosphere of amity and understanding, with national and international participation.

The founders of this institution had the foresight to see what could unfold in the years to come, and how the IIC could be a part of developments in a new nation and also contribute to debates globally. Such debates have kept pace with time. Since its beginning in the early 1960s, programmes at the Centre have reflected global and national concerns and continue to create awareness and influence public opinion on relevant issues. Through its close contacts with prominent academic and cultural institutions within and outside India, and through its networking with diplomatic missions in the capital, the IIC draws scholars, thinkers and professionals from India and abroad.

The list of speakers who have addressed audiences at the IIC is diverse and includes thinkers, activists, statesmen and opinion-makers. From Pearl S. Buck to Ivan Illich in earlier times, the list also has, in recent times, grown to include eminent personalities such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Willy Brandt, Henry Kissinger, Noam Chomsky and Eric Hobsbawm. Eminent names from the world of literature like Mahasweta Devi, Orhan Pamuk and Amitav Ghosh also figure among many prominent speakers who addressed the audience here. Looking at these names, it is evident that the IIC has truly developed into a forum where divergent views are not only

accommodated but also encouraged to enrich dialogue and discourse.

I am glad to know that it was at the IIC, in the little garden named 'Gandhi King Memorial Plaza', that the late Narayanbhai Desai narrated Gandhi Katha for a week in 2010. I have been told about numerous other memorable cultural events organised here.

Dear friends,

A Diamond Jubilee is an occasion for celebration in the life of any institution. The IIC deserves to be congratulated for having retained and sustained its original mandate. I am happy to learn that during its Diamond Jubilee year, the IIC has chosen to especially focus on programmes related to women and gender.

This reminds me of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, the great freedom fighter and social reformer who had played a key role in the making of the IIC. She was the one who – in the words of my illustrious predecessor, Dr. Radhakrishnan – turned “the first sod for this building”. She is known to have influenced Mahatma Gandhi to include women participants in the Salt Satyagrah. She was the pioneer among women who contested elections right after India's independence and thereby became a symbol of the struggle for women empowerment.

As we celebrate the 75th anniversary of our independence with 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav', let us also highlight the significant achievements of women and the several legal and social initiatives that seek to bring about change. There are several examples of Indian women who, before and after independence, have shattered many glass ceilings. Let us not forget the fearless women scientists of the Mars Orbiter Mission called MOM. Women were among the leading Corona Warriors who demonstrated extraordinary resilience

and provided healing touch to save fellow citizens, often risking their own lives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Women's participation in the unorganised sector of our economy is very high. The formal economy needs to do much more to empower women-workforce. Women should be encouraged to participate more in what is known as 'STEMM', that is, Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Management. National and global economies stand to benefit from their talent and their creative ways of responding to challenges.

Dear friends,

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal-5 seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. We need to eliminate structures of violence and exclusion that block women's progress and to open all avenues for them so that they realise their potential in diverse fields.

While the Government has, over the years, taken several initiatives to make women empowerment a mass movement, I am sure debates and discussions at the IIC during the year ahead will generate suggestions to make the national initiatives more effective.

Dear friends,

When the great philosopher Dr. Radhakrishnan, who was then Vice President, inaugurated the IIC on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 1962, he outlined his vision of an institution such as this. He said, [and I quote] "... we should strive for serene contemplation, for lucid and orderly

thinking, for beauty, harmony and wisdom. A centre like this has the setting for such activities.” [un-quote]

While the IIC has lived up to the expectations, I wonder if the nation has a sufficient number of similar institutions providing the setting for such activities. Of course, there have been institutions – some older, many newer – providing a platform to thinkers, scholars and artists to come together and exchange views. Metropolitan cities such as Mumbai and Bengaluru as well as traditional centres such as Varanasi and Prayagraj have nurtured intellectual dialogue. But the practice, it seems, has remained restricted to certain geographies.

In the Diamond Jubilee year of the IIC, I wish there were hundreds of IICs across India, in several states and small towns, setting high standards of debate and discussion. Just as the IIC has not remained an ivory tower, the new centres too would be engaged in the task of making the world a better place through the use of reason.

India has had a widespread tradition of ‘vaad-vivaad’ and ‘samvaad’. India’s ancient philosophy, called ‘darshan’, is often acknowledged to be far more subtle and robust than the best of philosophical works produced elsewhere. Today, we need to reconnect with that heritage. I find that the people, especially the youth, are keen to learn more – not only in terms of facts but also in terms of tools of critical thinking necessary to arrive at truth.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, I remember the late Shri Soli Sorabjee for his great contribution to this institution. I congratulate the Board of Trustees, the Executive Committee and other past and present office-bearers of the IIC on the occasion of its Diamond Jubilee. I recall with

appreciation the performance of Shri N.N. Vohra when he was Governor of Jammu and Kashmir. I also feel happy to note that after taking over as the President of IIC he has brought about transformational changes. My best wishes to the members and management of IIC for an even more remarkable future.

Thank you,  
Jai Hind!