

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT INDIAN COMMUNITY AND FRIENDS OF INDIA
RECEPTION**

Hanoi, 19 November 19, 2018

1. I am delighted to meet you. I am honoured to be paying a State Visit to Vietnam. I thank you for your warm and affectionate welcome. I wish to convey my deep appreciation and respect for the monks and nuns of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha who have welcomed me with their traditional drum ceremony.
2. India-Vietnam friendship is civilizational. Our relations have been exceptionally warm and cordial. Our people have stood by each other during most difficult times. Our founding fathers - Mahatma Gandhi and President Ho Chi Minh have guided us on a shared path. I have come here to deepen those enduring ties. I look forward to my official engagements with President Phu Trong tomorrow. I will also have the honour to address the Vietnamese National Assembly. I am thankful to the government of Vietnam for according me this very special gesture.
3. The Buddhist Sangha is an important institution promoting friendship between our two countries. Through them we have nurtured our ties with compassion, kindness and blessings of Lord Buddha. The Buddhist monks were as active in promoting our relations in ancient times as they are today. Monks and merchants brought Indian culture, philosophy and religion to the shores of Vietnam. Buddhism, Hinduism, Brahmi script and Sanskrit language soon, thereafter, took roots in this country. I had the privilege to visit the world famous Cham temples today and to see the deep imprint of these exchanges on this ancient land and its proud people. As a tribute to our age-old ties,

I planted a banyan tree there, a symbol of our shared spiritual journey.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. As a friend and partner, we take immense pride in Vietnam's spectacular achievements. Over the years, this country has made huge socio-economic advances. Sustained high levels of economic growth, combined with vision and foresight of its leadership, has seen rapid progress and prosperity. Per capita GDP in this country has gone up from less than US\$ 100 in 1990 to over US\$ 2500 today making a huge difference in the lives of ordinary citizens. Agricultural growth has been a key driver of this remarkable feat. As a development partner, we feel privileged to have contributed to Vietnam's agricultural revolution and food security. Today, Vietnam is a star among the emerging markets and is highly integrated with the global economy. Like India, it is a young demography, and like us, making every effort to meet the aspirations of its young people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. India and Vietnam have been together in a cultural journey for ages. And now both of us are on a similar transformational economic path. India is today the fastest growing major economy in the world, with a growth rate of 8.2% last quarter. Our knowledge and innovation driven industry has made a mark for itself the world over. We are making steady progress towards becoming a 5 trillion economy and the 3rd largest consumer market in the world by 2025. Vietnam's rise and growth is equally impressive.
6. We have undertaken path breaking economic reforms including the introduction of Goods and Services Tax that has realized our long-held dream of making India into "One Nation, One Tax, One Market". Our policy measures have

seen us jump 65 places in the World Bank Ease of Doing Business in the last four years. And while we are pursuing economic growth, we are also equally conscious of our social equity goals. Women empowerment has been at the centre of all our socio-economic programmes, be it MUDRA - our micro-credit lending scheme or Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao that is Save Girl Child - Educate Girl Child Scheme.

7. During the visit of our Prime Minister to Vietnam in September 2016, we had decided to elevate our bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Cooperation in defence industry, hydrocarbons, energy, agriculture, pharmaceuticals and healthcare were identified to enhance collaboration. Our intent has translated into concrete results. I am happy to learn that today, India is one of Vietnam's top trading partners and we have seen a major jump in our bilateral trade and investment relations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. The Indian community in Vietnam is small in number. But it plays an important part in promoting bilateral ties and creating opportunities for the local economy and society. The Indian community in Vietnam has many accomplishments to itself. Through hard work and dedication, you have earned a name for yourself and pride for us. Our IT professionals and technology entrepreneurs are helping build digital pathways in this country. Our ancient links and modern ties with this country place very high expectations on you from your Vietnamese friends. But I must say, you have most respectfully lived up to those - bringing the best of India to Vietnam be it art, culture or our familial ethos. I am told Yoga is immensely popular in Vietnam and is a strong binding element between our two societies. Our common sensibilities have also made Indian television serials and films have a wider and appreciative audience here.

9. India is on a transformative journey. In our quest for peace, prosperity and development, Indian citizens abroad and the overseas Indian community serve us as equal partners. There are new opportunities and possibilities opening up for you to connect, collaborate and grow with India. I encourage you to join us in this journey, as knowledge partners, as investors and as cultural ambassadors.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. Our Government has made it a priority to reach out to our overseas community. There is new and vibrant connect between us and our Diaspora today. To serve them better, we have strengthened our Embassies to provide round the clock service, so that no one in need is left unattended. We are utilizing social media platforms and digital programmes such as MADAD to deliver efficient public services. We have reached out to those in dire need, from Yemen to Venezuela, caught in violence, crisis or natural disasters. And not just to Indians alone, but to people of over 50 other countries.
11. Next year, we are celebrating the Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas in Varanasi from 21st to 23rd January. I invite you to join us in this special festivity of our Diaspora. We have begun the 150th birth anniversary celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi this year. I do hope you will come forward and help us illuminate his life and legacy in this country.
12. I also invite you to visit Rashtrapati Bhavan whenever you are in India. It may be my official residence but it is a place of pride for all Indians, and as such belongs to me as much to you.

Ladies and gentlemen,

13. I convey my appreciation for the efforts of the Vietnam-India Friendship Association, the Vietnam Union of Friendship Association and the India Studies Department of Universities here in promoting a greater understanding of India in this country. I also thank the Indian Business

Chamber in Vietnam for playing an active role in engaging the Indian community. More importantly, I thank our Vietnamese friends for extending a welcome hand to all Indians living in this country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

14. India and Vietnam share similar opportunities and challenges. We must come together with pride and purpose and help each other grow and prosper. Let the age-old thought and wisdom of the Mekong and the Ganga guide us on this path.

Thank you.