

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

Manila, October 20, 2019

1. I am happy to be with you today. I thank you for your warm and special welcome. We celebrated the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi on 2nd October the world over. You also remembered him fondly in Manila. We just saw a cultural programme on Mahatma Gandhi and our Freedom Struggle. I hope Bapu's ideals and his sacrifice shall continue to inspire us in our daily lives.
2. It is always a pleasure for me to meet our brothers and sisters abroad. In each of the 26 countries that I have visited as President of India so far, I have met with the Indian community and shared my thoughts with them. To meet our people in faraway lands is an emotional and special experience for me, one that you have when you meet your near and dear ones.
3. My State Visit to the Philippines marks an important occasion. We are celebrating the 70th anniversary of our diplomatic relations with the Philippines this year. I met with President Duterte day before yesterday and held talks on the way forward for our bilateral ties. President Duterte was highly appreciative of the role of the Indian community in the Philippines. He had kind words to say about you and his decades-old relationship with friends of Indian origin.
4. I also addressed a business event. Just before coming here, I had the honour to unveil a bust of Mahatma Gandhi at Miriam College in Quezon City. On my visit, I also had the opportunity to interact with the beneficiaries of the Jaipur

prosthetic foot and with parents of babies who have successfully undergone liver transplant in India. I am delighted that India's outreach and external engagement today touches the lives of ordinary people as never before.

Ladies and gentlemen,

5. Our community in the Philippines has been a strong bond of friendship between our two countries for decades. The size of the diaspora has grown remarkably over the last few years. All of you are contributing to the economy and society of the Philippines and to the image of India and Indians in the Philippines. We deeply value your contribution.
6. I am happy that you have maintained your culture and traditions in this country. You have also done well to keep our languages alive in your daily lives, be it Punjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi or Gujarati. I understand that yoga is very popular in the Philippines and ayurveda is also gaining ground. You must do your best to promote our heritage and knowledge for the well-being and happiness of all. It is matter of immense pride for us that wherever our community goes, it takes with it the values of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", that is - the whole world is one family. In these times of strife and violence, it is these values of our civilization that can ensure peace and friendship among peoples and countries.
7. It is not surprising that such a large community has also created places of worship in the Philippines which helps in meeting the spiritual needs of the community. I understand that apart from Hindu temples, as many as 26 Gurudwaras exist throughout the length and breadth of this beautiful country. This year, we are celebrating the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Devji and I convey my good wishes to all of you on the occasion.

8. I have heard many stories of the Philippines being a hospitable and friendly country for Indians. As professionals, as entrepreneurs and as technocrats you have freely pursued your vocation and contributed to the progress and prosperity of this country. The people here have been warm and welcoming to you. And so have they been to the thousands of students from India studying medicine here. The signing of a Tourism Promotion Agreement during my visit promises to bring the people of the two countries further close.

Ladies and gentlemen,

9. India-Philippines relations are driven by our shared values such as commitment to democracy, secularism and pluralism. Our ties are both old and new. We cannot but be proud of our seafaring forefathers who more than a millennium back established cultural and commercial ties between India and the South East Asia.

10. With regard to the Philippines, these ties are yet to be fully explored and documented. But we do know that old artifacts have been unearthed in the Philippines that are distinctly of Indian influence. The Laguna Copper Plate inscription, the oldest artifact discovered in the Philippines, is written in Kavi which possibly derived from the Pallava script. A golden statue of Goddess Tara has also been found in Agusan. Clearly, these finds testify that our relations with the Philippines are not new. In my discussions with President Duterte, we have decided to undertake a systematic study of these ancient relations and civilizational connections.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. India today is the land of many opportunities and many possibilities. We are committed to transform India, to unleash the energy of our youth, to build next-generation infrastructure and to eradicate extreme poverty in not so distant future. India

is today one of the fastest growing major economies. Our target is to become a 5 trillion economy by 2025. We are committed to inclusive growth, where each and every section of the society is cared for. Our socio-economic programmes have brought immense benefits to the poor. Our Ayushman Bharat programme, the world's largest health insurance scheme, covers 500 million people, and our Jan Dhan Yojana has facilitated over 370 million people to open bank accounts and reap the benefits of formal banking economy.

12. In our efforts to build a new India, we need your support and helping hand. I call upon you to avail of the opportunities that India today offers- for innovation, investment, research and education. Our flagship initiatives such as Make in India, Digital India, Skill India, Ganga Rejuvenation Project, Swachh Bharat Mission, Smart Cities and Jal Jeevan Mission seek your partnership.

13. We are making rapid progress in India and as much in our external engagement. Our bilateral economic engagement in terms of investment and presence of Indian companies in the Philippines is on the upswing. India-Philippines trade has risen to nearly 2.5 billion US dollars. However, for our two fast-growing economies, the quantum of our bilateral trade is still modest. There is much potential which needs to be tapped. I am sure with your initiatives and enterprise; we can do much more to bring prosperity to the two countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

14. India is deeply committed to strengthen its bond with the diaspora and to attend to your needs. We have already relaxed rules and regulations for you to obtain OCI cards. We have made our consular service delivery people-sensitive and people-friendly. We are dutifully reaching out to those in need, through social media platforms and through community

networks. We are also offering seats in educational institutions for your children to study in India. And we are running “Know India Program” for the youth and for the elderly, to connect you deeper to your roots and to your culture. Here in the Philippines, the Embassy will soon begin printing of passports in Manila and this will drastically reduce the time taken for issuance of new passports. We hope to serve you better and better.

Ladies and gentlemen,

15. I treasure this opportunity to address all of you. I wish you success in all your endeavours and wish you Diwali greetings in advance. And before I say good bye, I warmly invite you to visit Rashtrapati Bhavan when you are in Delhi next. Yes, it is my official residence, but it belongs to all Indians. We look forward to welcome you.

Thank you!