

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF VIETNAM**

Hanoi, November 20, 2018

1. It is an honour for me to be addressing the National Assembly and through it the people of Vietnam. I would like to thank the members of this Assembly, who represent all regions of your country, and particularly Madam Chairperson for extending the invitation. And I would like to thank President Nguyen Phu Trong and the government and people of Vietnam for the warm hospitality accorded to my delegation and me over the past two days.
2. For India, all diplomatic engagements are important but some relationships are special. Our friendship with Vietnam is certainly special. Vietnam is the first ASEAN and Southeast Asian country I am visiting in my capacity as President of India. In fact, this is my first state visit to any nation to the east of India. Vietnam is always on our minds, and always in our hearts. It is pivotal to India's "Act East" policy.
3. The strength of engagement between two countries is represented by their bilateral calendar. Four years ago, my predecessor, President Pranab Mukherjee, came to Vietnam. Two years later, in 2016, our Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi, arrived for a landmark visit that upgraded our linkages to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. The year 2018 has been even more intense. In January, I had the opportunity to welcome Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan to our Republic Day celebrations, at which he was Chief Guest, along with leaders of other ASEAN countries. In March, we were privileged to host the late President Tran Dai Quang. His sudden passing was a shock for all of us. He was a great patriot and an ardent advocate of India-Vietnam relations. I offer condolences on behalf of the Government and people of India, and on my own part as well.
4. I would take this opportunity to congratulate General Secretary and President Nguyen Phu Trong for the overwhelming confidence reposed in him by the Party and the National Assembly and for assuming the

responsibility of President of Vietnam. I am confident that India-Vietnam relations will prosper with his support, guidance and leadership.

5. India's association with Vietnam has many aspects. We have robust business, political and people-to-people bonds. We exchange parliamentary visits, as members of this Assembly are no doubt familiar. We are both ancient maritime nations and are stakeholders in the commerce, security and stability of the Indo-Pacific Region. Above all, we share the same values. Our founding fathers taught us to dream the same dreams – dreams for ourselves, dreams for each other, dreams for post-colonial nations everywhere, and dreams for the future and for our children.
6. I would like to point out that 2019 is of great significance. In India, it marks the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and in Vietnam it is being commemorated as the 50th anniversary of the passing of the great Ho Chi Minh. These revolutionary figures inspired our respective countries to attain political freedom. They remain inspirations for not just Vietnam and India but for the entire Asian continent and the global community. The coming year once again links these two remarkable personalities, and unites our countries.
7. The values of liberty, freedom and integrity that Gandhiji and President Ho Chi Minh espoused are rooted in our shared history – a history of scholarship and mutual learning, and of abiding Buddhist and Hindu spiritual connections. The enlightened path of the Buddha has brought our countries closer. Buddhism's journey as a world religion began from India, and in Vietnam it acquired a unique identity, embedded in local culture. Buddhist monks and nuns travelled far and wide, carrying with them the cargo of compassion – and also showing the way to traders and businesspersons. Buddhism created an early form of globalisation and of connectedness across our ocean.
8. Yesterday, in Da Nang, I saw glimpses of Vietnam's rich heritage when I visited the Museum of Cham Culture and the My Son temple complex, where, I was happy to note, the Archaeological Survey of India is contributing to the restoration of your cultural marvels. Almost 2,000 years ago, the Cham kingdom symbolised one of history's great

civilisations. From Vietnam, it traded across the ocean – its ships carrying goods as far west as India and West Asia. It is believed that ancient Vietnam had flourishing maritime and trade links with southern India's Pallava and Chola kingdoms.

9. Those pioneering travellers and pilgrims promoted fraternal relations between cultures and countries – but within a framework of restraint and self-discipline, sustainability and accommodation. These are important lessons from Lord Buddha that are relevant for us even today

Members of the National Assembly,

10. The historical values and lessons I referred to have also shaped India's approach to socio-economic development. We believe in development that is people-centric, that adds value to rather than adds a burden to local communities; that respects and conserves nature and the environment and is not extractive; and that challenges and disincentivises corruption and related practices. In India we are deeply appreciative of the rapid progress made by Vietnam in recent years. Poverty levels here were at over 70 per cent in the 1990s but are below 10 per cent today. India too is on course to eliminating extreme poverty by 2030.
11. Our economy and society are going through a massive change. Technology is transforming the way we live and work, and empowering local communities. Digital India and the humble mobile phone are bridging physical gaps – whether enhancing communication or providing virtual bank accounts to those in remote locations. A start-up ecosystem, one of the largest in the world, is leveraging technology and relatively frugal capital to promote entrepreneurship among young people, among self-driven men and women, and even among farmers looking for a wider market for their produce. Our space programme is launching satellites for several friendly countries as well as providing invaluable data on weather and soil patterns for those of our citizens engaged in agriculture. We are preparing to send an Indian into space. India will be happy to share its developmental experiences with Vietnam as per your country's priorities.
12. Such ideals shape India's international cooperation. Take the challenge of climate change. It poses a danger to all humankind, but coastal

nations such as India and Vietnam feel the pressure that much more. While many steps are needed, a push towards renewable energy is essential. It is with this in mind that India hosted the founding conference of the International Solar Alliance earlier this year. The ISA is an international body headquartered in India, but with implications for our entire planet. I invite Vietnam to become an active part of the ISA family.

13. Climate change is not the only question mark looming before the Indo-Pacific Region. This ocean system is a resource for Vietnam and India and for so many other countries and communities. Vietnam and India share a vision for the Indo-Pacific Region, of which the South China Sea is a critical component. We share a vision of a rules-based order that respects sovereignty and territorial integrity, ensures freedom of navigation and over-flight, as well as unimpeded commerce. Our shared vision seeks peaceful resolution of disputes, with full respect for legal and diplomatic processes in accordance with principles of international law, including those reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
14. In this context, India looks forward to enhanced bilateral cooperation in the maritime domain – for instance, through our first Bilateral Maritime Security Dialogue to be hosted by Vietnam in early 2019. Maritime security, piracy, and drug trafficking using the oceans are issues of common concern. I am confident that the programme of regular and friendly visits to each other's ports by naval and coast guard ships from our countries will upgrade cooperation.
15. Such confidence is only enhanced by the knowledge that Vietnam will be taking over the ASEAN Chair in 2020. India has consistently supported ASEAN's unity and centrality and ASEAN-led mechanisms for regional security and economic architecture – to promote peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific Region. India offers a cooperation model that does not require its friends to make choices but rather expands choices and expands opportunities for all; that opens not one but many roads.

16. Beyond our region, India and Vietnam remain committed to cooperation in areas of emerging risk such as cyber-security, and in multilateral organisations. Hard-won gains of international governance and of globalisation must be nurtured. The world community must respond collectively to worldwide challenges. India is thankful to Vietnam for its support in building consensus for an early adoption of a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism at the United Nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. At the root of India's and Vietnam's national endeavours are the aspirations and the prosperity of our people. Enhancing business relations and physical connectivity between our countries is vital for this. We are both dynamic economies. Vietnam has had an impressive, export-driven growth, and India is today the world's fastest growing large economy. Bilateral trade touched US\$ 12.8 billion in the past year and India is one of Vietnam's top 10 trading partners. For India too Vietnam and ASEAN are crucial to its trade basket. A high-level business delegation is accompanying me, and yesterday I addressed the Vietnam-India Business Forum. I am certain that enterprising businesspersons from our countries will help us reach new trade benchmarks.
18. There is scope for cooperation and complementarities in textiles and agriculture and agricultural technologies, in biotech and IT, in energy and pharmaceuticals, and in infrastructure and minerals. Indian investors, Indian manufacturers and Indian services providers look to Vietnam with much excitement.
19. And so do, I must say, the rest of the people of India. Back home, Vietnamese food is becoming more and more popular – and a society of tea drinkers has acquired a taste for Vietnamese coffee. I am keen that tourism between Vietnam and India expands and direct flights in the period ahead help more and more of our citizens to visit each other's countries. In the ultimate analysis, the people-to-people network between Vietnam and India – an inheritor of one of the oldest people-to-people networks in Asia and the Indo-Pacific – is the foundation and the edifice of our partnership.

20. With those words, and with a renewed thank you to Madam Chairperson and the members of this Assembly for having hosted me, I conclude my address. May the wisdom of Lord Buddha and may his message of embracing compassion and cooperation continue to guide our people, our countries and our shared oceanic region.

Thank you!