

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

Sydney, November 21, 2018

1. This is my first State Visit to Australia. I am delighted to meet you. I thank you for welcoming me with such warmth and affection. The beautiful Bharatnatyam performance by the Nartana Dance School and its accompanying melody, for a moment, made me feel, as if I was in some corner of India, and not in a faraway continent.
2. In my visits abroad, I always, and as a matter of priority, meet with our community. In fact, my interaction with the Indian Diaspora is invariably the first element in my program. And I must say, it is indeed a special and warm feeling to meet our people, our friends abroad, and to share with them thoughts and greetings from families back home.
3. I began my programme today with a visit to ANZAC war memorial. It is a monument dedicated to those who gave their lives to protect the freedom of others. It also celebrates the bravery and courage of Indian soldiers who fought in World Wars alongside their Australian brothers in Gallipoli and other theatres of war.
4. Tomorrow, I will have yet another occasion to celebrate the sacrifice and freedom for humanity. Along with Prime Minister Scott Morrison I will jointly unveil a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Parramatta. This year we have launched our worldwide celebrations of his 150th birth anniversary and the statue will be a perfect tribute to his life and legacy. I do hope you will join us there. I will also hold official talks with the Governor General and Prime Minister and discuss how to enhance bilateral ties, which already have moved to a new strategic high, much beyond our mutual passion for cricket and our shared Commonwealth connect.
5. We have a large and diverse Indian community in this country speaking different languages and practising multiple faiths. This has been a month of festivals. We celebrated Diwali recently. Today is Milad-un-Nabi, the Prophet's birthday, and I greet all our Muslim brothers and sisters on the occasion. Day after tomorrow, on 23 November, we will be celebrating

Guru Purab. I convey my wishes in advance for the day to our Sikh brother and sisters here. I understand that people from all parts of Australia - from Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and several other cities have come to meet and greet me. It speaks of the strong connect you have with India, your country or the land of your ancestors.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. Indian community in Australia has a long history. The first batch of Indians came here over hundred years ago. In the early 20th century, Indians arrived in Australia to work in banana plantations and in goldmining. A number of them were our Sikh brothers, who first settled in Woolgoolga and then moved elsewhere. They worked hard and withstood the rigours of time. Even in their daily struggle, they did their best to preserve their cultural moorings and way of life.
7. It is remarkable that the community continues to remain committed to preserving and nurturing its culture and tradition. We just enjoyed a spectacle of that dedication. And not just that, you have also embraced the local Australians in warmth and affection. I am happy to learn that you celebrate your festivals and fairs with much enthusiasm and pride. On Baisakhi, Holi, Diwali, Eid and Christmas, you not only greet each other but also your Australian friends and neighbours. This is worthy of praise and emulation. And in the true spirit of our inclusive Indian way of living, you have also taught the joys of Halloween to your young ones.
8. It is a matter of pride for us that the Indian community in Australia is highly respected. Today, Indian skills and professionals are much sought after here and elsewhere in the world. Australia is also home to a large number of Indian students. They are excelling on campus in studies, research, innovation and sports. Their hard work and talent are showing in the strength of Australia - India Knowledge Partnership. I would be speaking on this theme at the Melbourne University day after tomorrow.
9. For many of you, Australia is your new home, for still others it is your karmabhoomi. I am happy that you have been welcomed with open arms in your adopted country and in your professional spaces. India and Australia are multicultural societies. This shared uniqueness about the two would have been comforting to you as you settled down here, making friends, families and associations. You have made significant contribution to the well-being of this country. As entrepreneurs, doctors, teachers,

bankers and technology experts you are adding immense value to the Australian society and economy. We are, indeed, proud of your achievements and your success.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. I know you keep yourself updated with developments in India. Many of you visit India regularly. But those who travel after a gap of a few years will find a new India, a new experience awaiting you!
11. Our growth and development mirrors a new confidence in the country. India is the fastest growing major economy in the world, with a growth of 8.2 per cent last quarter. Our path-breaking introduction of the Goods and services Tax has made India into One Nation, One Tax, One Market for the first time in its history. This and other seminal reforms have helped us jump 65 places in the last four years on the World Bank Ease of Doing Business Index. Global Investor confidence in the country is at a new high. We have received over US\$ 200 billion as Foreign Direct Investment in the last four years. Our work on building next - generation infrastructure including 100 Smart cities, 7 high speed train corridors, 10 greenfield airports, countrywide digital connectivity and thousands of kilometres of expressways continues apace. And we are working overtime not just for growth, but also to empower women, the differently-abled and those at the bottom of the pyramid.
12. Riding on high growth and transformative socio-economic changes, the youth in the country are brimming with ideas and energy. Their enterprise and innovation has made India into the third largest Start-up ecosystem in the world.
13. India today is full of opportunities for business, for social enterprises and for cultural connections. I invite each one of you to join us in our transformational journey. You can contribute with your ideas, your business models and your investment profiles. We count Australia as a key partner in our national flagship programmes - Make In India, Skill India, Clean India and Digital India. We are keen to leverage Australian technology, knowhow and investment for growth and development in India. You can play an important part in pushing this engagement.

Ladies and gentlemen,

14. In the last few years, you would have seen a sea-change in the way

our Government is engaging and reaching out to our Diaspora. There is today a stronger connect between India and the Indian community abroad. We have started schemes such as the “Know India Programme” to better connect with our people abroad. Our OCI scheme has been made flexible so that more and more people can benefit from it. We have mandated our Embassies to be available round the clock to our people in need. And we are extending humanitarian assistance as and where required. In the last four years, we have rescued over 90,000 Indians including people from 50 other countries caught in natural disasters or strife.

15. We count our Diaspora as an important partner in strengthening our international outreach. You have a role to play in spreading the message of India. Yes, we do have our High Commissioner here, but we see each one of you as our cultural ambassador. We count on you to enhance our relations with Australia, as you have remarkably done all these years. Next year, we would be celebrating the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas from 21st to 23rd January in Varanasi. I invite you to join us in this festivity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

16. It has been a pleasure sharing my thoughts with you. Australia is a country defined by passion and love for sports. Today, we have a T-20 India-Australia game in Brisbane. This format has changed the game of cricket in many ways. My wishes to both teams. I possibly cannot imagine my State Visit complete without meeting our Australian friends in a sporting arena. I must drop by at the MCG on November 23 to wish both the Indian and Australian cricket teams. You may be on the blue side or yellow. That does not matter. We must celebrate sports, for the sake of it and for our togetherness. I also invite you to visit Rashtrapati Bhavan when you are in India next. Yes, it is my official residence, but it belongs to all Indians and you must come-by to soak its pride and history.

Thank you!