

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND AT THE LUNCH HOSTED
IN HONOUR OF THE ASEAN HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, January 25, 2018

Your Majesty;
Excellencies;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

I am delighted to welcome you to India. Thank you for making this special effort to be with us today, to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of ASEAN-India relations. I am confident that you will hold fruitful discussions during the Leaders Retreat and the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit, later today. I convey my best wishes for a successful Summit.

Your Majesty,
Excellencies,

We look forward to your august presence tomorrow as our Guests of Honour for India's 69th Republic Day celebrations. This would be a historic occasion for us, and I thank all of you for gracing the occasion. Your presence at our Republic Day is in keeping with our desire to strengthen, the already excellent relations with ASEAN. It reaffirms the strategic importance we attach to our friendship.

India-ASEAN relations have come a long way since we established our Dialogue Partnership with ASEAN on 28 January 1992. Today, ASEAN is our Strategic Partner. We hold 30 dialogue mechanisms between India and ASEAN, including Annual Summits and 7 Ministerial Meetings in a wide range of sectors.

India's "Act East policy" reinforces our ancient links with South East Asia through enhanced political, security, economic and cultural ties.

In this context, India greatly values ASEAN's role as a proponent of peace, stability and prosperity in the region. We reiterate our support to ASEAN's unity and centrality. We stand shoulder-to-shoulder with ASEAN in pursuit of a rules-based regional architecture which is open, inclusive, balanced and equitable.

Your Majesty,
Excellencies,

We are bound by history and by geography. Culture, commerce and connectivity - ideas and thought - have woven us together in one common fabric. Guests are

considered auspicious in our cultures. They bring happiness and prosperity. We cannot thank you more for bringing the rain-showers along.

Our partnership is based on our shared heritage and is built on the foundation of strong people-to-people contacts, nurtured through the millennia. The theme of the Commemorative Summit: “Shared Values, Common Destiny” is reflective of our desire to work for a shared future, defined by cooperation for mutual benefit.

Your Majesty,
Excellencies,

We have begun the New Year with fresh hopes and ambitious dreams. We live in difficult times characterized by traditional and non-traditional security issues. Terrorism and violent extremism are eating into the vitals of our society. We must deepen our resolve to jointly overcome the challenges we face.

We also live in times of ingenious innovation, of boundless creativity, of unparalleled global interaction. These are creating new opportunities for our youth and our people. We need to connect them with the changes sweeping our lives, through highways, I-ways and more.

I am confident that your visit heralds a new beginning in our relationship, and in our common quest for peace, progress and shared prosperity.

Your Majesty,
Excellencies, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I invite you to please join me in raising a toast :-

- to our shared values; and
- to our common destiny.

May our relationship scale new heights and constitute a defining partnership of our times.

Thank You.