

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

Zagreb, March 26, 2019

1. It gives me immense pleasure to meet all of you today. I thank you for your heart-warming and colourful welcome. To be received in a faraway land with such affection speaks of the depth of India-Croatia togetherness and friendship. We are truly impressed by your embrace and understanding of Indian culture. Yesterday when I arrived at the hotel, I was received with chants of Bharat Mata Ki Jai and Vande Mataram. It was a very special surprise for me. For those moments, it appeared to me as if I was not in Croatia but in some part of India.
2. Today is a historic day in India-Croatia relations. I am honoured to pay the first ever State Visit from India to this beautiful country. I thank the Government of Croatia for their warm hospitality. I had fruitful interactions with the President and the Prime Minister of Croatia today. We signed key agreements in the fields of sports, tourism and promotion of Sanskrit and Hindi. We also agreed to take firm and decisive action against terrorism.
3. I am truly delighted to be in a country that has had affinity with India for centuries. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore visited here in 1926, and influenced many Croatian poets and writers. The Indology Department of Zagreb University has made an outstanding contribution to the study and promotion of Indian languages, philosophy, history and culture in Croatia. I am impressed to know that it regularly organizes conferences on Vedas and Puranas. I look forward to my engagement at the University tomorrow.

My fellow Indians,

4. For me, it is a very special feeling to meet our brothers and sisters abroad. Few days ago, we celebrated Holi in India. And as we did so, we remembered all our families and friends, not just in India but in every corner of the world. And we remembered you too! You must have also splashed and played colours and wished your near and dear

ones in India and elsewhere. Croatia is adopted home for many of you, for still others it is a home away from home. A large number of you are long-term residents of this beautiful country, while some of you may have arrived just recently. Many of you have retained your Indian nationality while some of you now possess Overseas Citizenship of India. It is very heartening to see that irrespective of your background, all of you have found a welcoming home in this country, and are contributing in your own ways to the development of Croatia. Yet, you have kept India and Indian values and traditions alive in your hearts. You are a true reflection of India with its rich diversity, cultural heritage and traditions.

5. We rejoice in your achievements and wish you even greater success. You are also the prism through which the Croatian people see India, and your success here has contributed to building a positive image of India in this country. I convey our gratitude to the friendly people of Croatia for their generosity and large heartedness in welcoming you in their homes, and in their social circles.
6. I am particularly pleased to see a large number of Friends of India in this gathering. You have, indeed, made this event a memorable one. We are truly humbled by your admiration and love for India, our customs, our beliefs and our way of life. The role that each one of you, and the associations that you belong to, have played in enhancing engagement and understanding between India and Croatia is truly commendable. We also deeply appreciate the effort you have put in creating a vast network of cultural institutions, dance and yoga schools, Ayurveda clinics and Indian stores and restaurants. All these have popularized India across Croatia and across all age groups. We were truly impressed that International Day of Yoga was celebrated last year in 37 cities across Croatia. I understand that the Festival of India in Croatia was launched last month. This will further showcase various facets of India to the Croatian people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

7. We attach the highest importance to our Diaspora and their well-being. In recent years, we have taken several initiatives to strengthen our connect with you, and to bring you closer to India. Our OCI Card scheme has been made more flexible for the benefit of many. Our Embassies are more proactive in dealing with your issues. We have

used technology, particularly social media, to reach out and listen to your concerns. We are working to make the delivery of Consular services ever more efficient. As an Indian abroad, you should feel proud and rest assured that India will be there for you in time of need. This was the case with over 90,000 Indians whom we rescued from strife, violence and natural disasters in the last five years.

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. Croatia's success in football last year and her scenic beauty have significantly enhanced Croatia's image in India. We are keen to deepen our relations, particularly on the economic side. A good foundation has already been laid, with investments by both sides. The Indian business delegation accompanying me is looking forward to useful engagements with their counterpart Croatian companies tomorrow. There is good potential to strengthen trade, investment and technology cooperation. Your support to explore new areas of collaboration would be invaluable.
9. The Indian economy is today an important engine of global growth. It is the fastest growing major economy, with robust economic indicators. There is a new dynamism in the country. I would, therefore encourage you to visit India, and experience the transformative changes happening. Our globally connected, technologically savvy, and entrepreneurially driven youth are at the forefront of this change. Thanks to them, there is no doubt that India will be the centre of global attention for a long time to come.
10. Croatia can take advantage of these opportunities in India for mutual benefit. Our national programmes like Make in India, Digital India and Start-up India provide new business prospects. I would like you all to disseminate such information and encourage greater business ties.
11. The values of democracy, pluralism and peace that India stands for, and its economic growth story, have combined to make India a force to be reckoned with. We stand ready to work with everyone to find solutions to global challenges. We are ready to extend a hand of friendship to one and all. This year's Kumbh Mela, the holy congregation for the blissful dip in the Sangam, the confluence of three rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati, was a unique event

that exemplified the global reach of Indian culture. Over 250 million pilgrims from every corner of the world immersed in its spirituality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

12. Peace and security are critical to foster the well-being of humanity. We are deeply grateful to the Government of Croatia for its steadfast support against terrorism. The world needs to take decisive action against those who harbour and support terrorists. As for India, we have made it clear that we will take all necessary measures to protect ourselves, to secure ourselves, so that we can provide for the welfare of our people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

13. This year marks the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. It also marks the 550th Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Sikh Guru. We will celebrate these events across the world, including in Croatia. Today, I announced gift of a bust of Mahatma Gandhi to the government of Croatia. We hope to unveil it here on 2nd October 2019. We count on your enthusiasm and support to make these celebrations a success.

14. I see a great future for the relations between India and Croatia. I am sure you will continue to contribute meaningfully to the strengthening of the bonds between our two countries and our two peoples. It has indeed been a pleasure meeting you. And I invite each one of you to visit Rashtrapati Bhavan, when you happen to be in Delhi next. Yes it is my official residence, but it is a monument that belongs to all of you.

Thank you!