

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND ON THE OCCASION OF DEDICATION OF A
MEDICAL COLLEGE AND HOSPITAL TO THE NATION IN JAGDALPUR**

Jagdalpur, July 26, 2018

1. I feel a special affinity when I am among my tribal brothers and sisters in Chhattisgarh. As such, I was extremely happy to accept the invitation of Chief Minister Raman Singh to be here today. There was another reason too. Yesterday, I completed a year of my Presidency. I had wanted to mark this day with my tribal brothers and sisters and with little children, away from Delhi. And so I took this opportunity to come to Bastar.
2. After assuming office as the President of India, I have travelled to almost all parts of our country. I have visited tribal communities in our Northeast and in the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand. In 2017, when I was in Chhattisgarh, I travelled to Giroudpuri. I know the Bastar region extremely well. I have been witness to the services rendered by organisations such as the Ramakrishna Mission in remote areas of Narayanpur and Abujhmad. In May 2017, when I was still the Governor of Bihar, I had visited the Surguja region. The people of Chhattisgarh, especially our tribal communities in the Bastar region, have preserved the Indian tradition of hospitality – of Atithi Devo Bhava. I will cherish the love and affection I have received over the past two days.
3. The Government Medical College that has been established here in the memory of the late Baliram Kashyap links the traditions of this region with the study of modern medical science. Baliram Kashyap was the “Voice of Bastar”. He was an energetic advocate of the development of this region and a much respected public figure. I was fortunate to know him closely. Today, I feel a sense of satisfaction in inaugurating this medical college and hospital. It will be very valuable for the residents of Bastar and I dedicate this hospital to them. The

essence of our country lies in regions such as Bastar. If one wants to experience the soul of India, one must come here. And in the development of rural and tribal areas lies the development of India.

4. There is a refreshing transformation taking place in this region. A university has come up, as well as an engineering college and a medical college. One can see good roads. Internet and mobile connectivity have been enhanced and an optical fibre network is available. The vision and resolve behind these programmes is commendable. I congratulate the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, Dr Raman Singh, and his team in the state government. Most of all, I congratulate the people of Bastar.
5. This is a moment of dramatic changes in India. Great efforts are being made for the welfare and development of rural and tribal communities. Housing for all, especially for the poor, with facilities for a toilet, drinking water and electricity, are a national endeavour. New schools and educational institutions, including IITs and AIIMS, are being established. Skills-based training is being imparted to young people. Fellow citizens from smaller locations and with moderate incomes are experiencing air travel at affordable rates. Gradually, the gap between the well-off and the not-so-well-off is becoming smaller.
6. Ordinary citizens too are taking initiatives to achieve such goals. I would want to share the story of the late Kunwar Bai, a remarkable lady from the Dhamtari district of Chhattisgarh. She became an ambassador for the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan in this state. Devoted to the cause of cleanliness and hygiene, she sold the few goats she had to pay for a toilet in her house. This inspired so many others in the district and Dhamtari began to do well on Swachh Bharat benchmarks. A few weeks ago, Kunwar Bai passed away at the age of 106. She left behind a shining example for Chhattisgarh and for the entire country.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters

7. It is unfortunate that some of our people have been misled by Naxalism and have tried to foment violence and create an environment of fear. Violence is not part of India's culture and traditions. It has no place in our Constitution. I am happy to note that dedicated people in society and in the administration have tried to win the confidence of such young people and sought to wean them off conflict. This is a welcome step and will strengthen the effort for peace and development. I appreciate the work of the state and Union governments in this regard, and of course of the mass urging for change and for peace among the people of the state – all of you.
8. I must also appreciate the troops and officers of the police and paramilitary forces that have done duty with valour and courage to uphold the rule of law and provide security to our people. Some of them have made the supreme sacrifice and lost their lives. On behalf of a grateful nation, I salute our martyrs. Today is Kargil Vijay Divas, and I also salute the sacrifices of those in the Indian Armed Forces and their families.
9. In Heeranar yesterday, I had the pleasure to understand the integrated farming technique being used by our farmers and by women self-help groups. I met people who are running a rice mill, and are engaged in agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, poultry, bee-keeping and organic farming. They are working with great energy on the same campus. I also met some women who are running the Danteshwari e-Rickshaw Service. It was very moving to see them at work. Our tribal sisters are working very hard to shape the future of their children and their families. They are an inspiring example of empowerment and enterprise among women in our country. When female incomes rise, the family benefits that much more – for the money is put to good use. That is why the economic empowerment and financial literacy of women is crucial for the development of this region and of every family here – and of our society and country.

10. Little children welcomed me at the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram in Heeranar. Their smiles and their innocence were infectious; their eyes wore a reflection of their dreams. It was very touching. We had a long conversation and ate together. Memories of my own childhood came rushing back. I began my journey in similar and similarly difficult circumstances. My school was in another village. I had to walk, often run, barefoot for many kilometres. Sometimes it was very hot and the earth below my feet was scorching. The struggle was a lesson in itself. I like to believe it gave me the resilience to move ahead. Yesterday I saw that same resolve in the eyes of those little children. It was an unforgettable moment for me.
11. My life has taught me that one can best overcome challenges with education. I am confident that the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Education City in Javanga will be an agent for change. I spent some time with divyang children at the Saksham School in the Education City. Here too their affection and innocence was overwhelming. It was difficult not to be affected by their sheer grace. I was happy to see the modern facilities at the residential school. I am sure the children will achieve much for the country.
12. I also visited the Aastha Vidya Mandir residential school. Eleven hundred children belonging to families affected by Naxalite violence live here. They are preparing for a new life. The “smart classes” and “Tinkering Labs” have enabled these children to win national and international awards. Indu Manikpuri, a girl from the school, has won the A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Ignite Award.
13. On hearing this, I was reminded of Hima Das, a young girl from Assam’s Nagaon district who recently won India’s first gold medal in the 400 metres event of the World Junior Athletics Championship. Like Indu, Hima has risen from very tough circumstances. Girls and young women all over the country have the potential to become a Hima Das or an Indu Manikpuri. We need to script a new destiny for

India by nurturing such talent and by promoting such plucky and talented girls.

14. About 1,000 young girls and boys of the Bastar region are working in the Yuva BPO located in the Education City. They are providing services to domestic and international clients. I was left astounded by the changes I saw and by the possibilities. Someday, these young people could build world-class companies of their own ... right here in Bastar. I am told that the state government has plans to provide smart phones and erect mobile towers in large numbers. About 4.5 million women and 500,000 young people across the state are to benefit from this programme. In Bastar, this will introduce young men and women from tribal communities to mobile banking. In a sense, this will take us just a little closer to bridging the gap between Bastar and Bengaluru.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters

15. As President of India, it is my humble privilege to receive gifts and mementoes both within the country and abroad. There are so many such occasions that one tends to lose track. But I must say that the mementoes that I received yesterday from the divyang children at the Saksham School and the tribal children of the Astha Vidyalaya are invaluable for me. The memento I have received here today is also special. It tells the eternal story of Jhitku Mitki of the Bastar region and is a magnificent handicraft. This sample of Bastar's craftsmanship will have a special place in Rashtrapati Bhavan.

16. I must emphasise Rashtrapati Bhavan is not just where I live and work. It is a symbol of our democracy and part of the heritage of every Indian. It belongs to all of you. The next time you are in Delhi, please visit it. You are very welcome. And as I conclude, I wish all of you and I wish Chhattisgarh the best. In the words of the local language: "Chhattisgarhiya, sab le badhiya!"

Thank you,
Jai Hind!