

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

Banjul, July 31, 2019

1. Before I begin, let me introduce the distinguished members of my delegation - Shri Pratap Chandra Sarangi, Minister of State for Micro Small and Medium Enterprises & Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Government of India, he hails from Odisha; and Shri Dilip Ghosh, Member of Parliament from West Bengal in the Lok Sabha. I thank you for your warmth and affection, and for your very special and colourful welcome. Indian dance and music have indeed travelled far and wide. But what makes the short spectacle that we just saw so distinct is the ease with which our Gambian friends have adapted to our cultural rhythm. I truly applaud their efforts.
2. आप सभी से मिलकर मुझे अत्यंत प्रसन्नता हुई है। आप लोग बड़ी संख्या में आज यहाँ आए हैं, यह मेरे लिए संतोष और गौरव का विषय है। मुझे बताया गया है कि केवल गाम्बिया से ही नहीं बल्कि पड़ोसी देश सेनेगल और गिनी बिसाउ से भी भारतीय समुदाय के लोग यहाँ आए हैं। मैं आप सभी को यह बताना चाहता हूँ कि मैंने जिस भी देश की यात्रा की है, उस देश में रह रहे भारतीय समुदाय से मिलने को मैंने हमेशा प्राथमिकता दी है। विदेशों में रह रहे अपने लोगों से मिलने का आनंद अलग ही होता है और ये सुखद मुलाकातें मेरी स्मृति का हिस्सा बन जाती हैं।
3. Our relations with The Gambia go back several decades. But my visit to The Gambia is the first ever by an Indian President. This is, indeed, a historic occasion for India-Gambia relations. And what better way to celebrate it than with members of our own Indian community, who have,

over the years, contributed to the progress and development of these friendly ties. Today, I met President Adama Barrow. I also addressed a special session of the Gambian National Assembly. This was a rare honour bestowed on me and through me on the people of India and Indians residing here and elsewhere.

Ladies and gentlemen,

4. Here in The Gambia, I am told that the Indian community has integrated very well into Gambian society and has established a good reputation for itself and for India. I congratulate you, therefore, on being successful representatives of India and for imbibing the spirit of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" – that is - the world is one family. You have made a mark for yourself, through your hard work, dedication and significant contribution to Gambian society. As teachers and educators you have given a helping hand to nation building in this country. As entrepreneurs, you have created economic opportunities and imparted skills to local people. And as traders you have helped foster commerce and industry between the two countries. More importantly, you have nurtured your cultural moorings and traditions to glow and grow in this country. I am happy to learn that you speak in your mother tongue with families and friends, be it Hindi, Malayalam, Sindhi, Gujarati or Punjabi and are eagerly passing on the same to your future generations. You also celebrate your fairs and festivals, from Holi, Diwali, Eid to Vishu. And not just among yourselves but also involving the local community. This cultural intermingling has created space for Indian languages and entertainment among the local people. I am told there are Bollywood programmes aired on radio in Banjul with the Gambian jockey speaking in Hindi! This is what we call confluence of cultures.

5. I am happy to learn that the Indian community has always risen to the occasion whenever called for help by the local government. During the Ebola crisis in this region, the community contributed handsomely to The Gambian government efforts for emergency assistance. Whenever the National Hospital here has had a shortage of medicines or consumables, the community has got together and provided the same. By taking up such noble causes, you have endeared yourself to the Gambian people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. This year, we are celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our Nation. Tomorrow, I will be inaugurating an Exhibition on Mahatma Gandhi at the Ebunjan theatre to celebrate his life and legacy in Banjul. You must come to see the display and to learn from the Mahatma and his teachings. There was a deeper meaning in whatever he did. He championed Khadi which he himself spun daily as a symbol of self-reliance. I hope you will try to imbibe his values in your daily lives, for that is how we can create a better tomorrow for our future generations.
7. I deeply appreciate your role in popularizing Indian culture, music, dance, Ayurveda, food and spiritual consciousness in this country. I am glad to know that Yoga is widely practised in The Gambia and that the International Day of Yoga is celebrated every year with much fervour.

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. In our quest for development and growth, the overseas Indian community is an invaluable partner. We are keen to connect with you deeper and stronger. To this end, we have taken a number of initiatives such as the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, Know India Programme, Scholarship for Diaspora Children and Bharat Ko Jaaniye Quiz. We have

also established the Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra in Delhi, as a one-stop resource centre for our Diaspora.

9. To support our Diaspora abroad, we have a special focus to make public service delivery smooth, hassle-free and efficient. We have undertaken several measures to make it easier to obtain passport, consular documents and OCI cards. To reach those in need, we have employed social media, apps and digital platforms for quicker and targeted service. In the last five years, we have rescued over 90,000 Indians, as well as nationals from 50 other countries, caught in humanitarian disasters abroad. As a result of our initiatives, there is a new confidence among our people overseas in the government. They are assured that when in need; we will stand by them and stand for them.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. India is on a transformational growth path. There is new energy and purpose in the country. We have set a target to double our GDP to 5 trillion dollar in the next 7 years. A week back, we successfully launched our second Moon Mission, Chandrayan Two. It was a moment of great pride for us. In 2022, we will celebrate the 75th anniversary of our Independence. We are marching on a journey towards a prosperous New India of the 21st century. Government of India has implemented various initiatives such as Make in India, Digital India, Goods and Services Tax, Swachh Bharat, Ayushman Bharat, and Ujjwala Yojana. These are unleashing transformative economic growth and social change, and ensuring that the fruits of progress reach all corners of the country and all sections of the society.
11. I invite you to join us in this journey, a journey of progress and prosperity for one and all. I also invite you to visit Rashtrapati Bhavan when you are in Delhi next. It may be my official residence, but it belongs to all Indians. It is part of your heritage and pride. I thank you once again for

coming here this evening. I extend my best wishes to each one of you for your health, progress and prosperity.

Thank you.