

**SPEECH BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB  
MUKHERJEE AT HELSINKI CITY HALL**

**Helsinki, Finland: OCTOBER 15, 2014**

Excellencies,

Mrs. Pouskari Chairperson of the City Council,

Mr. Jussi Pajunen, Mayor of Helsinki,

Mr. Tatu Rauhamaki, the Chairman of the City Board and

Distinguished Guests,

I thank you for your kind words.

I consider it a matter of great honour to receive the Medal of Honour of Helsinki.

At the very outset, I would like to thank you for the warm reception accorded to me by the City Council of Helsinki.

I am particularly happy to be here - especially as this visit is the first by a Head of State from India after a gap of 26 years. My discussions with His Excellency the President and my other meetings with the leadership of Finland have reinforced my confidence that the traditionally warm ties of friendship and co-operation between India and Finland will only intensify and strengthen in the days and years to come - to the mutual benefit of the people of India and Finland.

Helsinki, the "Daughter of the Baltic Sea" is a fascinating and beautiful city. As I look about me at this vibrant city, and learn about its infrastructure and capacities, I see an ultra-modern, yet environmentally friendly city. It is a very significant fact that it was chosen to be the World Design Capital for 2012 - in the same year that it completed 200 years as Finland's capital.

I am delighted to be here in this historic building, the seat of the City's highest decision making body. I have noted, with great interest, that the Helsinki City Council has a long history, having held its first meeting as far back as 1875.

In giving me this honour, you are honouring the people of India. Your Excellency, local self government is an area where India and Finland have much in common. Throughout its ancient history, going back four to five thousand years, India has had a tradition of local self-government. Villages and cities in India have had elected local bodies to attend to administrative responsibilities and deliver justice. Our Constitution provides for local self governance – and the 'Panchayati Raj' system, as we call it today, has established itself as a successfully functioning basic unit of administration and development.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the City Council, as I address the people of Helsinki through you, I would like to underline the value that India attaches to her friendship with Finland. Although our peoples

are separated by oceans and continents, they have successfully forged links through their shared values. We are both open societies, we have a shared commitment to democracy, individual freedoms, the Rule of Law and upholding of human rights. We firmly believe in the principle of harmonious co-existence of peoples in peace and with mutual respect.

Our common interests in the field of science and technology, our complementarities in the fields of information technology and engineering , our fruitful collaboration in biotechnology and the joint projects that we have taken up in polar research, oil exploration and clean and renewable energy have brought our peoples closer together in a mutually beneficial way.

In recent years, our bilateral cooperation has become increasingly multi-faceted and dynamic. We have begun to match our economic complementarities and our scientists have successfully partnered to achieve very interesting outcomes - whether in the field of bio-diagnostics or third generation bio-fuels or simple innovations that can be commercially developed by small and medium enterprises in India and Finland alike. We, in India, welcome entrepreneurs from Finland who have set up base and are working in India. We value their contribution in developing environment-friendly technologies. This in fact is one of the priorities of our Government and the success of Indo-Finnish collaborations in this field is certainly very promising.

India is an old civilisation with a 'young' population: 65% of our population is presently below 35 years of age. Upgrading their skills for their effective participation in nation building is a high priority for the Government of India. We look forward to co-operating with Finland in the skills development sector. During this visit, a number of agreements and MoUs are being signed. These will link premier academic and scientific institutions in India and Finland in noteworthy collaborations and promote joint work in many areas of shared interest. There is a lot that we can learn from the experiences, best practices and successful innovations of Finland; our scientists and professionals, too, have much to bring to the table.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have much to look forward to in our bilateral partnership. It is evident that the geographical distance from India and the cold weather here have not deterred young professionals from India from living and working amongst you. I thank the people of Finland for making them feel welcome and comfortable.

With these words, I would like to extend to you and through you, to the friendly people of Helsinki, the warm greetings of the people of India for your continued progress and prosperity.

Madame Chairperson and Distinguished Office bearers of the City Council, I take this opportunity to invite you to visit India.

I once again thank you for presenting me the Medal of Honour of this great city and wish you every success in your endeavours for the citizens of Helsinki.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I invite you to raise a toast

- To the health, happiness and success of our hosts, Their Excellencies, the Chairperson, the Mayor and the Distinguished Members of the Helsinki City Council,
- The success of the people of this historic City,
- The continued progress and prosperity of the people of Finland, and
- The enduring friendship between India and Finland.

Thank you