

ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA

SMT DROUPADI MURMU

ON THE OCCASION OF CIVIC RECEPTION IN LAKSHADWEEP

Kavaratti, March 18, 2023

I am overwhelmed with happiness and gratitude after your elegant and traditional way of welcome. You are known for your generous hospitality and strong patriotism. I am indeed delighted to be here in these charming islands amongst you on this momentous occasion.

The name of this place, as you know, comes from the Sanskrit term which means one lakh islands. This also means that there must have been so many islands in those ancient times. As it is cut off from the mainland, there was no human population here for long. But a sense of adventure and enterprise must have drawn people to this archipelago. Living in this serene atmosphere, people of Lakshadweep also have a serene mind-frame. The society here believes in harmony. In the mainland, we remember that among the few parliamentarians who had a long and distinguished career, there was Shri P.M. Sayeed from Lakshadweep Islands. You elected him continuously from 1967 to 2004, and this fact shows your preference for accord.

I am glad that with a vision to develop the islands, the Lakshadweep Administration has been pushing for reforms to bring a total shift in the development trajectory of the islands during the last few years. Your Administrator, Shri Praful Patel ji, is known for his exceptional dynamism and also a vision for a better society. Apart from giving a push to infrastructural development, right-sizing of government, and encouraging private sector participation, the Lakshadweep administration deserves a

special praise for setting up desalination plants in many islands, two of them for Amini and Kalpeni Islands I have just inaugurated, to provide drinking water to people.

I am sure that these steps will create employment generation and livelihood opportunities with focus on priority areas such as fisheries, agriculture, tourism and physical infrastructure.

The main focus of the Administration and the Government of India is to position Lakshadweep as a unique tourist destination in the world. Lakshadweep Islands have high potential for tourism as these are blessed with scenic beauty of white sand beaches, coral and diversified marine ecosystem. The Administration is engaged in the development of high-end eco-tourism projects at Kadmat, Minicoy and Suheli as anchor projects under the aegis of NITI Aayog. Its vision is to establish a robust base for maritime economic growth with tourism development.

It is a matter of pride that India's first water villas are going to be built in the blue lagoons of this Union Territory. These innovative initiatives in the field of tourism will certainly boost the face of tourism in a big way. More importantly, it can emerge as a model of eco-tourism for the whole world. I am told that special emphasis is being laid on conserving the nature with the development.

In order to modernise the fisheries sector and improve the economic status of the fisher communities here, the ICAR-National Bureau of Fish Genetic Resources and Department of Fisheries are making efforts to expand rearing technology through "Community Aquaculture" for enhancing the income of native women islanders. A facility called 'Germplasm Resource Centre' for marine ornamentals is established at Agatti Island. It is indeed hand-holding the community aquaculture units, maintained by women. This is a unique venture, in which science and social development is taken up hand-in-hand with local resources.

Dear sisters and brothers,

As you are well aware, Lakshadweep has huge potential for developing the seaweed industry. Cultivation of seaweed in Lakshadweep will drastically reduce the import bills of pharmaceutical companies and hotel industry which are banking on foreign products. Efforts have already started in Lakshadweep with participation of the local community, women SHGs, island cooperative societies and private entrepreneurs. Lakshadweep can become the seaweed capital of India in five years.

It is rightly said that the investment in knowledge pays the best interest. Following this principle, the Lakshadweep Administration has established five colleges. This Union Territory provides state-of-the-art facilities for schoolchildren. Lakshadweep has a better teacher-pupil ratio than most other places in our country. I appreciate the Administration for its commitment and dedication to improve the school education system. To empower students with vocational, employable and entrepreneurial skills as envisioned in the National Education Policy 2020, the Department of Education runs digital literacy courses in the schools of Lakshadweep. I am confident that these efforts of the Department of Education will help children of this geographically insular region achieve their dreams.

Talking of children of Lakshadweep, let me tell you that I was overjoyed when Kumari Mubassina Mohammed brought laurels to the nation by winning two silver medals in the fourth Asian Youth Athletics Championship held at Kuwait last year. She has also been selected to represent India in the fifth Asian Youth Athletics Championship scheduled at Tashkent in Uzbekistan next month.

It is also satisfying to learn that the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has approved the establishment of a 'Khelo India Centre' at Amini

Island. Football is selected as the training discipline and a Football Academy is established to provide regular coaching. I look forward to budding footballers from Lakshadweep playing at national and international levels!

Dear sisters and brothers,

It is quite heartening to know that the Administration has started the development of five hospitals in various islands of Lakshadweep. This will improve the health infrastructure here and reduce dependency on the mainland for healthcare requirements. It, thus, follows the path of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

In today's era, it is crucial to have internet access for the overall development of any region. Keeping that in mind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already awarded a submarine optical fibre cable project in Lakshadweep and it is a matter of joy that it will be completed within a couple of months.

Since Lakshadweep is a geographically isolated place, the question of the supply of electricity may require extra consideration. In the spirit of Atmanirbhar Bharat, I envision development of alternative sources of energy, which will safeguard the environment of these beautiful islands and also show the world a way for eco-friendly development.

Dear sisters and brothers,

I would like to conclude by saying that I am grateful for the extraordinary warmth and affection of the people of Lakshadweep. I will cherish my first visit to this Union Territory for the rest of my life. I wish all the very best to the people of Lakshadweep.

Thank you,

Jai Hind!