

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

Santa Cruz, March 30, 2019

1. It gives me immense pleasure to meet the members of the Indian community and friends of India in Bolivia. Thank you for your warm and affectionate welcome.

2. My visit to Bolivia is the first ever by an Indian President. This is, indeed, a historic occasion for India-Bolivia relations and what better way to celebrate it than with those special people, our very own Indian community members and Friends of India, who have, over the years, contributed to the progress and development of these friendly ties.

3. Yesterday, I had an excellent meeting with President Morales. We signed several key MOUs to further guide and propel our relations. The Bolivian government conferred on me their highest award. Yes, it was an honour conferred on me, but in true essence it is a recognition bestowed on India and her 1.3 billion people including some of you present here. I once again thank the Bolivian Government for their highest consideration and respect.

4. We attach high importance to our relations with Bolivia and with the Latin American and Caribbean region as a whole. This continent represents a huge reservoir of goodwill and cultural affinity for India. And in generating and sustaining this friendship, the Indian diaspora has played a key role.

Ladies and gentlemen,

5. I understand the Indian community in Bolivia is small. Yet, you have made a mark for yourself here, through hard work, dedication and enterprise. You represent India's diverse cultural and spiritual heritage in this equally diverse land. And you have done it with pride and respect, eliciting affection and admiration from your hosts. I understand many of you here come from Punjab. Yesterday, I

presented a colourful piece of phulkari embroidery to President Morales. As you know, like India, Bolivia also has colourful weaving traditions, and of multiple types. The vibrancy on the phulkari spread would surprise our friends in this country as to how similar our two traditions are, even though we are two different countries, two different cultures, located thousands of kilometers away, in two different continents.

6. I also understand that our sikh brothers and sisters, even though few in number, have built a Gurudwara here, for their spiritual solace and upliftment, and to be connected to their roots. We compliment you for preserving your culture and values, while respecting and even assimilating local customs and practices. This year we will be celebrating the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev ji, who taught us to lead selfless lives in the service of humanity. I do hope you will join us later this year in Santa Cruz to pay our homage to him and seek his blessings.

7. On 13 April this year, we will also be observing the 100th anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy, to remember our heroes and their sacrifice. As you know, in our tradition, Saints and Gurus are revered and respected. To commemorate the Prakash Parv of Guru Govind Singh ji, the Government has released a special coin. Furthermore, it has taken the historic decision to construct the Kartarpur corridor and fulfill the wishes of the devout.

8. This year, we are also celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation. Yesterday, I addressed the students at the Gabriel Rene Moreno Autonomous University on the life of Mahatma Gandhi in a newly built auditorium. I also unveiled a plaque naming the auditorium after Mahatma Gandhi. I thank the University and the Government of Bolivia for this very special gesture.

Ladies and gentlemen,

9. I am happy that the Indian community in Bolivia has made a large number of local friends. Of them, some are present here. They have a special affinity for India and its culture and ethos. I deeply appreciate their role in popularizing Indian music, dance, Ayurveda

and spiritual consciousness in this country. I am glad to know that Yoga is widely practiced in Bolivia and the International Day of Yoga is celebrated every year with much fanfare. 2017 was unique in this regard. You marked the International Day of Yoga on the shores of the iconic Lake Titicaca. We could not have done more to connect the inner peace of yoga with the serenity of nature. On our side too, we are learning from Bolivia, from its music and age-old food habits. Some of you would know how popular Quinoa has become in India, as a health and diet choice. And I must share with you, I also take quinoa in my meals as a substitute for rice. The Golden Grain of the Andes now has home in the Himalayas, and we are growing this wonder food in our foothills.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. We value the role our diaspora is playing in the development of our nation. We want you to carry our message of friendship and goodwill to the high mountains and deep river valleys of this ancient land. And we want you to do more to enhance business between India and Bolivia. With your local knowledge on both sides and your entrepreneurial skills, you are best placed to make new business openings, be it in mining, IT, solar energy, automobile, agriculture and pharma sectors. As we strengthen our ties with Bolivia, we are very keen that our economic relations pick up steam. Some of you would have met with the Indian business delegation accompanying me on the visit. We need your support to bring more Indian companies to invest and create new opportunities and jobs in Bolivia.

11. And while we seek your support, we are doing our best to strengthen our connection with you. This year the Pravasi Bharatiya Sammelan, the global festival of Indian diapsora, was held in Varanasi. It was a huge success with unprecedented turnout of our families and friends from abroad. They also got a chance to participate in the Kumbh Mela and take a dip in the holy Sangam! The month long Kumbh saw over 250 million people from all corners of the world participating in the spiritual congregation.

12. We are equally keen to connect with our diaspora youth, for they are the future of our relationship. To this end, we held the Youth

Pravasi Divas, the Know India programme and the Bharat Ko Janiye quiz. On public service delivery, we have undertaken several measures to make it easier to obtain passport, Consular documents and OCI cards. In India, we have opened 300 new Passport Sewa Kendras making it easier for those in villages and small towns to travel abroad. And to reach those in need, we have employed social media, apps and digital platforms for quicker and targeted service. Over the last five years, we have rescued over 90,000 Indians caught in strife, violence or natural disaster abroad. As a result of our initiatives, there is a new confidence among our people overseas. They are rest assured that when in need, they have their government to give a helping hand.

Ladies and gentlemen,

13. You may be aware of the transformation underway in India. Our people are dreaming big, aspiring big and creating big. We are committed to build a New India, a India of hope and prosperity, by 2022 when we celebrate the 75th anniversary of our Independence. I invite you to join our promising journey, a journey of progress and prosperity for one and all. I thank you once again for joining us this morning and wish each one of you a successful and prosperous future. 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 and you must visit to learn more of them.

Thank you.
Muchas gracias!