

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

Berne, September 12, 2019

1. It gives me immense pleasure to meet all of you today. I thank you for your warm welcome. The canton of Fribourg has been the centre of music for centuries. We just heard their band play and enthrall us. We were also fortunate to have them in India recently, where they performed to a packed audience. I thank them for their music and friendship.
2. On this visit, I am accompanied by a high level delegation comprising our Minister of State for Women and Child Development, Madam Debasree Chaudhari, she hails from West Bengal; and two Members of Parliament from Lok Sabha, Dr Ramapati Ram Tripathi from Uttar Pradesh and Mr Basanta Kumar Panda from Odisha.

देवियों और सज्जनों,

3. हाल ही में हमने भारत और स्विट्ज़रलैंड के बीच मैत्री समझौते की 70वीं वर्षगांठ मनाई है। इस यादगार अवसर के तुरंत बाद, इस खूबसूरत देश में आकर मुझे बहुत प्रसन्नता हुई है। पिछले सात दशकों में, हमारी दोस्ती बहुत फली-फूली है। हमारे प्रवासी समुदाय का इसमें विशेष योगदान रहा है। आज आपसे मिलकर मुझे बेहद खुशी हो रही है। विदेश में, अपने लोगों से, अपने भाइयों-बहनों से मिलने का एक अलग ही आनंद है। आपसे मिलना मेरे लिए केवल मुलाकात भर नहीं है, बल्कि यह मेरे लिए एक विशेष और सुखद अनुभूति है। कल, स्विट्ज़रलैंड के राष्ट्रपति से मेरी आधिकारिक वार्ता होगी। उनके साथ मिलकर मैं एक बिज़नेस राउंडटेबल को भी संबोधित करूँगा। आज ही सुबह, मैंने बर्न विश्वविद्यालय के विद्यार्थियों को भी संबोधित किया है।

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. I am equally delighted that my visit to Switzerland is taking place in the middle of our celebrations to mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our nation. We are celebrating this anniversary the world over. Over 130 countries, including Switzerland and Lichtenstein, joined us in singing his favourite bhajan "Vaishnav Jan To Tene Kahiye". I look forward to unveiling his bust in Villeneuve on Saturday. This place holds a special significance for us. Mahatma Gandhi visited Villeneuve to meet his friend Noble laureate Romain Rolland. I am happy that you are celebrating the life of Mahatma Gandhi through a series of events all over Switzerland. I recall an anthology on Mahatma Gandhi written last year by the then President of Switzerland Mr Alain Berset. He wrote, and I quote "*the greatest tribute we could pay to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary is to try and uphold the universal qualities of selflessness, peace and tolerance*" unquote. This year is also special for us as we are celebrating the 550th anniversary of Guru Nanak Devji. His teachings and his humanism shall ever light and guide our lives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

5. India and Switzerland have so much in common, including our democracy and our diversity. The unique form of direct democracy in Switzerland inspires the world. In India, we have just completed the world's largest festival of democracy, where of the 900 million electorate, over 600 million voters went to a million polling booths to elect the government. The new government is committed to transform India in the spirit of 'Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas and Sabka Vishwas', that is "together with all, development of all, and trust of all".
6. Today, India is determined to become a 5 trillion dollar economy by 2025. Our strategy is not just to grow but do so with equity. In recent years, we made significant progress in agriculture, energy, healthcare, education and science and technology. We remain committed to doubling farm-income by 2022 and we remain steadfast in our call to empower women

and the less-privileged. We have launched the largest health insurance programme in the world - Ayushman Bharat. It is providing health benefits to 100 million less-privileged families in the country. Beyond domestic action, we have continued to make our mark in the international arena in the fields of Information technology, space, skills, defence and nuclear science. A few weeks ago, our second moon Mission, Chandrayaan 2 was launched. The gains from the Mission are firing the determination of our space scientists to conquer new frontiers.

7. Switzerland is a key partner in India's economic transformation and its scientific achievements. We have over 250 Swiss companies present in India. The number of Indian companies in Switzerland is also on the rise. I am happy to note that Swiss companies are participating in our Flagship Programmes like Make in India, Smart Cities, Digital India, Swachh Bharat, Skill India and other initiatives. We seek your support, ideas and initiatives as well to strengthen our growth and economy and build a New India.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. India is proud of its vibrant and diverse diaspora which has earned respect throughout the world. In Switzerland our Diaspora include members of Federal and Cantonal Parliaments, CEOs and senior executives of several companies, senior Government officials, professors, doctors, engineers and medical professionals. We also have an increasing number of Indian students at premier Swiss Universities. All of you are the bridge that brings our two countries closer to each other.
9. I am happy that you have nurtured your culture and traditions and kept them alive in Switzerland. You celebrate your festivals be it Holi, Diwali, Durga Puja, Eid or Baishakhi. These reflect our diversity and our richness. We began our Onam celebrations yesterday. I convey my greetings to you on the occasion, especially to our brothers and sisters from

Kerala. Today the entire world celebrates with India the International Day of Yoga on 21st June each year. In Switzerland, this year it was celebrated in twelve cities. I am told that there is appreciation of Ayurveda in this country as well and it is duly recognized as a system of medicine.

10. Switzerland has always welcomed India and has been open to its values and traditions. It has also brought good luck to us. Just weeks ago, P.V. Sindhu won the World Badminton Championship title in Basel becoming the first Indian ever to do so. We thank the Swiss authorities present here for their warmth and friendship. To this land of the Alps, Swami Vivekananda brought the message of universal brotherhood in 1896. He travelled hundreds of miles to reach Saas Fee in the Alps, which Swami called the 'Miniature Himalayas'. Later Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi came to this land with their message of friendship and harmony. I am happy that our present generation is building up on this solid foundation. I congratulate our Embassy and the Indian Associations in Switzerland for the growing cultural engagement between our two peoples.

11. Every year we celebrate the day of Mahatma Gandhi's return to India as the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. I am happy to recall that this year we have honoured Dr Rajendra Joshi, an Indian origin Swiss scientist with the Pravasi Bharatiya Award, the highest award given to members of the Indian diaspora. We remain ever committed to strengthen our relations with our Diaspora. To this end, we have taken several initiatives. We have streamlined public service delivery by our Embassies, making them people-friendly and people-sensitive. Our Embassies today are available 24 by 7 to help those in need. We have rescued over 90,000 Indians as well as nationals of over 50 other countries caught in natural disasters or humanitarian situations overseas in the last five years. As a result of these efforts, our people now have a new confidence in the government.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. It was, indeed, a pleasure meeting you today. I once again congratulate each one of you for your contribution towards strengthening Indo-Swiss ties. I wish you good health, happiness and success. And before I say good bye, I invite you to visit Rashtrapati Bhavan. It may be my official residence, but it belongs to all Indians. We await to welcome you.

Thank you.