

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE VALEDICTORY SESSION OF THE
16TH PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIVAS CONVENTION**

New Delhi, January 09, 2021

It gives me immense pleasure to connect with you all today at the valedictory session of the 16th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention. I also take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy new year. It would have been a delight to address you in person, but for the extraordinary situation forced upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I convey my heartiest congratulations to all the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awardees. I appreciate their efforts to promote better understanding of India abroad, contribute to social & humanitarian causes, and build closer links between India and their adopted countries. Their contribution in enhancing India's prestige deserves high praise.

I appreciate the efforts of the Ministry of External Affairs led by Dr. Jaishankar in organizing this convention despite constraints caused by the pandemic. I am glad to note that in the run up to today's convention, the Ministry has held five online conferences over the last one month, including those related to the 'Role of Diaspora in Promotion of Indian Culture' and 'Bringing Together India's Young Achievers & Diaspora Young Achievers'. Earlier today, the two plenary sessions were devoted to 'Role of Diaspora in Aatma-Nirbhar Bharat' and 'Facing Post-COVID Challenges'. Each one of the themes relates to high impact areas in the context of India's growing stature in the eyes of the world.

I am confident that the ideas that have emerged in the deliberations during these conferences and today's convention will guide us in engaging the diaspora in new and constructive ways.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On this very day in the year 1915, Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest Pravasi Bharatiya returned to India. He gave a much wider base to our social reforms and freedom movement, and during the next three decades, he changed India in many fundamental ways. Before that, during his two decades of stay abroad, Bapu had identified the basic principles underlying the approach India should adopt for its growth and development. The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is also an occasion to recall Gandhiji's ideals for individual and collective life. Gandhiji's emphasis on Indian-ness, non-violence, ethics, simplicity and sustainable development remain our guiding principles.

We are indebted to Bharat-Ratna Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ji whose vision re-energised the links with our diaspora. The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations started in 2003 when he was the Prime Minister of India. Atalji's initiatives have proved immensely helpful in strengthening the engagement of diaspora with the motherland. He also took the decision to set up a Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra which would become the focal point for linking the overseas Indian community with their country of origin.

It is appropriate that the Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra has been renamed as Sushma Swaraj Bhavan as a mark of tribute to Sushmaji's invaluable contribution to the cause of Indian diaspora. Her compassion and affection touched a large number of Indians abroad.

Dear Overseas Indians,

India has one of the largest diaspora populations of nearly 30 million, residing in every corner of the world today. It has been aptly put that 'the sun never sets on the Indian diaspora'. Known as the 'model minority', diaspora Indians have an impressive presence in the fields of science & technology - specially ICT & medicine - entrepreneurship, trade & commerce, academics, art, literature and sports. Some of you have reached leadership positions in administration and politics. You have spread the soft power of India and made your mark on the global stage. Your continued emotional attachment to India, its culture and traditions makes all of us very proud of you. You have been contributing to the growth and development of the countries of your residence and, at the same

time, you have been carrying your Indianness in your hearts. This emotional bonding has also translated into tangible gains for India. You have expanded India's global embrace. I have myself shared the sense of pride you feel whenever I interacted with you during my visits abroad.

I have been told that the Ministry of External Affairs has recently launched the 'Global Pravasi Rishta' portal and a mobile app to connect with the Indian diaspora across the world. This is a welcome initiative.

I am glad that His Excellency Shri Chandrikapersad Santokhi, the President of the Republic of Suriname, was the Chief Guest in this convention. His ancestral and cultural roots are in India. Shri Santokhi is such a great votary of Indian culture and traditions that he invoked Vedic Mantras in Sanskrit when he took his oath of office as the President in the month of July last year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Year 2020 has been the year of a global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. India has been at the forefront in forging a global response to combat the enormous challenges posed by the pandemic. We supplied medicines to nearly 150 countries, making the world look at India as the 'pharmacy of the world'. The recent success of our scientists and technicians in developing two COVID vaccines is a major achievement for the Aatma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan which is driven by the spirit of global well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to severe travel disruptions. I appreciate the role played by the Ministry of External Affairs and our Missions abroad for reaching out to the diaspora by facilitating their travel in these difficult times.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, members of Indian diaspora in several countries came together in ensuring critical medical supplies, helping stranded students, caring for the elderly, raising funds and providing meals to the vulnerable. By their service, they demonstrated the finest aspects of the Indian ethos.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The seeds of an Aatma-Nirbhar Bharat were sown many years ago by Mahatma Gandhi's call for Swadeshi and Self-reliance. Our vision of Aatma-Nirbhar Bharat has five key pillars of economy, infrastructure, demography, democracy and supply chains. Successful integration of all these factors will help achieve rapid growth and development.

The idea of 'Self Reliant India' or 'Aatma-Nirbhar Bharat' does not mean seeking self-centered arrangements or turning the country inwards. It is about self-belief leading to self-sufficiency. We intend to contribute towards mitigating disruptions in global supply chains by enhancing availability of goods and services. The Aatma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan of India will make the world order more just and fair, promoting greater cooperation and peace. Our diaspora has an important role in the realization of India's global aspirations.

Our Diaspora is our face to the world, and champions India's cause on the global stage. It has always come to India's aid, whether it is for advocacy regarding international issues of concern to India, or contributing to the Indian economy by way of investments and remittances.

Today's India offers unprecedented opportunities in many sectors. We have set a target of becoming a US\$ 5 trillion economy by 2024. The mission of 'Self-Reliant India' will also push the economy towards this target. Our investment promotion initiatives are being appreciated globally and India is among the preferred investment destinations. I am glad to share with you that recent reforms have steadily improved India's position in World Bank's 'Ease of Doing Business Ranking' from 142 in 2014 to 63 in 2019. Several steps have been taken in order to make Indian manufacturers globally competitive.

Ladies and gentlemen,

India believes in the philosophy of '*vasudhaiva kutumbhakam*', the world is one family. We have ensured that our development is shared with other countries. To this end, we look forward to engaging more meaningfully with you and seek your recommendations for providing further boost to our initiatives. We want you to actively participate in the making of 'New India'.

I invite each one of you to be a part of India's transformation story and contribute to it with your ideas, business models, investments, technical expertise and knowledge sharing.

On this occasion, I recall the rich welcome extended by the late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ji to the Indian diaspora in the first Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention. He had said that the children of Mother India get respectful hospitality in the motherland; our doors are forever open to welcome you. Please visit us at your pleasure. I also invite you to the Rashtrapati Bhavan whenever you come to India. I rely on Atalji's poetry to reiterate India's standing invitation to you all:

जब जी चाहे, तब आ जाना, सदा खुले हैं द्वार।

Thank You,

Jai Hind!