

# **KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE RUSSIAN DIPLOMATIC ACADEMY**

**Moscow, Russia: May 8, 2015**

1. It is my privilege to be here today at the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the outset, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Academy for honouring me by conferring an Honorary Doctorate. A matter of pride as it is for me, I see this as a manifestation of the enduring affection that the Russian people have for India. At the same time, it also reflects the depth and resilience of the relationship between our two countries, which I have experienced personally in my many decades of public life.
2. The Russian Diplomatic Academy was established in 1934. Since then, it has made a stellar contribution to Russian diplomacy in its role as the principal training institute for serving and aspiring Russian diplomats. This prestigious institution represents the finest ideals of humanity by training practitioners in the art of negotiations and preparing them to find diplomatic solutions to the challenges of peace and development. Active interactions with similar institutions in other countries have made this Academy an agent of diplomacy itself.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

3. I am in Moscow for the Commemoration of the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War. The crucial

role played by Russia and the sacrifices made by the Russian people during that historic period are well-known and widely recognized. I would like to convey warm felicitations to the Russian people on this historic occasion. Indians too made significant sacrifices during the War. In fact, our nations are united by our suffering and sacrifices in the fight against the forces of Fascism and Nazism. It is, thus, entirely appropriate that we today cherish and celebrate our shared victory.

Friends:

4. Formal diplomatic ties between India and Russia have a relatively short history of 68 years. Even then, numerous threads have linked our peoples and civilizations over the centuries. Afanasy Nikitin journeyed from Tver, near Moscow, to India in 1469 almost three decades before the Portuguese Vasco da Gama reached Kozhikode. Nikitin lived for three years at Bidar in the Bahmani kingdom. His travelogue about his experiences in India, "Journey Beyond the Three Seas", is still read with interest in Russia and India.
5. As early as 1615 onwards, merchants from Gujarat reached Astrakhan at the mouth of the Volga River where a thriving Indian community flourished till the middle of the nineteenth century. They were extremely well regarded by the Tsar in Moscow, to whom they supplied fine textiles. It is said that the Indian traders introduced a textile industry in the Russian capital in the middle of the seventeenth century.
6. Our two countries also share a robust tradition of intellectual, literary and philosophical inquiry. The Indologist, Gerasim Lebedev, was a pioneer of Bengali theatre in Calcutta in the

late eighteenth century. Leo Tolstoy was fascinated by Hindu and Buddhist scriptures. He was familiar with the thinking of Sri Ramakrishna and was impressed by the ideals of Swami Vivekananda. On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi was deeply influenced by Tolstoy's thoughts about non-violent resistance and the renunciation of force as a means of opposition. The artist and philosopher, Nicholas Roerich, came to India in 1923. With his wife Elena, he founded the Urusvati Institute of Himalayan Studies in 1928. He lived near Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, till his death in 1947.

7. Rabindranath Tagore's poetry, which made a passionate plea for universal peace, love and harmony, was widely admired both in Tsarist and post-revolutionary Russia. Several Russian translations of Tagore's *Gitanjali* were brought out soon after its release in 1913. Tagore predicted that Russia would be victorious against the fascists, foreseeing the heroism of the Russian people.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

8. It is noteworthy that India established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union as early as April 13, 1947, over four months before India became independent. Since then, India and Russia have built a durable and multi-faceted partnership. The Bulganin-Khrushchev visit to India in November 1955 heralded a new era in bilateral ties. The steel plants at Bhilai, Bokaro and Durgapur became symbols of our friendship. The emergence of military-technical cooperation in the 1960s, and the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation in August 1971, were major milestones in our relationship. The launch of India's first satellite Aryabhata in 1975 by a Soviet

launch vehicle and of the first Indian in space - Rakesh Sharma - in a Soviet spacecraft in 1984 underlined our close cooperation in space.

9. It was this powerful legacy of mutually-beneficial cooperation cutting across varied sectors that enabled our two nations to swiftly overcome the difficulties posed by wide-ranging changes of the early 1990s. It is no exaggeration to state that our unique and multi-dimensional ties have proved their resilience. India and Russia today enjoy what we have termed a 'special and privileged strategic partnership', based on unmatched mutual confidence, trust and goodwill.
10. Our Annual Summits are at the apex of an elaborate multi-layered mechanism for bilateral interaction, more detailed than India has with any country in the world. It has helped deepen and diversify our bilateral relationship over the past 15 years and evolve common approaches to major regional and international issues.
11. At the last India-Russia Annual Summit on 11 December 2014, our two countries agreed on a strategic vision to further strengthen and diversify cooperation in the years ahead. India values her close and extensive cooperation with Russia in defence, nuclear energy and security. Russia is and will remain our most important defence partner. It is also a key partner for our energy security, building on its leading role in the development of nuclear power generation in India. There are evident complementarities that underlie our cooperation in hydrocarbons. Russia is one of the world's largest oil and gas producers while India is one of the largest consumers. India's

largest investment in Russia is in the oil and gas sector. This can increase significantly and emerge as the driver of a resurgent economic partnership. Both countries are committed to do so.

12. In this 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the launch of Aryabhata, we have agreed to re-invigorate our cooperation in space. We have an extensive inter-governmental scientific collaboration programme. Joint centres of excellence have been set up to promote research in areas as diverse as powder metallurgy, vaccine development, super-computing, bio-technology, bio-medicine, gas hydrate studies, and earthquake research, to name a few. We are also looking at intensifying cooperation in innovation-driven projects in high technology areas.
  
13. During President Putin's visit to India in December 2014, we jointly agreed to the need to move our trade and economic ties to a higher level. We must build on synergies in areas such as engineering, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, fertilizers, coal, diamonds, metallurgy, civil aircraft, automobiles, and information and communication technology. Concerted and joint efforts will be needed to overcome structural and other impediments to India-Russia trade and economic collaboration. Indian businesses need to reach out to Russia's regions and be more responsive to business opportunities in Russia. Russian companies need to do the same. We need to comprehend each other's achievements and capabilities, and recognize the huge opportunities for investment and technological tie-ups in our dynamic markets.

14. Cultural and people-to-people ties bind us closely. We appreciate the warmth and openness with which Indian culture, philosophy and cinema are received in Russia. The exchanges between our Universities, institutes of higher learning, scholars, artists and intellectuals are of the highest significance and must be encouraged. A Festival of Russian Culture was celebrated in India last year. The Year of Indian Culture "Namaste Russia" is being celebrated in Russia this year. Tourism between India and Russia has grown significantly in recent years and can develop further.

Dear members of the Academy:

15. The world of today is equally one of unprecedented opportunities and grave challenges. Even as living standards and technological capabilities improve with each passing day, we are also witness to a re-emergence of conflict and serious economic and ecological crises in different parts of the world. Terrorism and extremism emanating from our shared neighbourhood remains a major security threat for India and Russia. Dealing with this challenge requires not only a strong commitment by our two countries but also cooperation among the international community.
16. Indeed, the international community requires cooperative and representative structures more than ever before. Though the world has become increasingly multi-polar and emerging economies have grown in strength, this is not fully reflected in international institutions and decision-making processes. Cooperation between India and Russia in multilateral fora, including G20 and BRICS is thus of great importance. We congratulate Russia on its Presidency of two important fora -

BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization - this year. We will work closely with our Russian friends to enhance multi-sectoral cooperation within these fora. We appreciate Russia's support for India's permanent membership of UN Security Council and membership of the multi-lateral export control regimes. We applaud Russia's efforts to promote a political settlement in Syria and its contribution towards a peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

17. India-Russia relations, shaped as they are by our respective historical experiences, cultural affinities, political convergences and economic opportunities, will not be affected by winds of transient global political trends. Russia has been a pillar of strength at difficult moments in India's history. You have contributed to India's development, growth and security. India will always reciprocate this support. Across Indian society and the spectrum of its political structures, there is unanimity that friendship with Russia is an important pillar of India's foreign policy.
  
18. Let me also take this opportunity to emphasize that the dynamic development of our strategic partnership owes a great deal to the vision and leadership of President Vladimir Putin. His personal commitment has led us to new heights in our relations. We recognize President Putin as a great friend of India. I look forward to renewing my association with him on this visit.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

19. Once again, I thank you and the members of this great institution for the honour you have bestowed on me today. I also wish to thank you for this unique opportunity to share my thoughts with you.

Long live India-Russia friendship!

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