

## **ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE TO THE KNESSET**

Jerusalem, Israel : 14.10.2015

Shalom & Namaste.

H'ble Mr. Yuli Edelstein, Speaker of the Knesset,

Members of the Knesset,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1.I feel deeply honoured to be the first Indian President to make a State Visit to Israel. Since I arrived here yesterday, I have been touched by the warmth of the reception and the gracious hospitality that has been accorded to me and to my delegation. It is indeed an honour to be invited to the Knesset to address the distinguished representatives of the people of Israel. I bring to you the warm greetings and goodwill of the people of India.

Distinguished Members of the Knesset,

2.Having participated intensely in the deliberations of the Indian Parliament since I was first elected to the Upper House in 1969, I feel very much at home when I visit other great Parliaments of the world.And this is one such occasion. The Knesset, with its unicameral structure and responsibilities of making the Basic Laws that substitute a written Constitution, has proved the power of parliamentary discussion and debate. Having been a Parliamentarian and public servant for over fifty years, I am , today, more convinced than ever , that a thorough deliberation - with due consideration of all shades of opinion - is the key to good policy making.

3.I am accompanied today by the Honourable Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment, Shri Thaawar Chand Gehlot and a delegation of Members of the Lower House of the Indian Parliament including H'ble Prof. K.V. Thomas of the Indian National Congress, Mrs. Meenakshi Lekhi, Prof. Dr. Subhash Bhamre, Shri Prathap Simha and Shri Vinod Chavda of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and Prof. Dr. Anupam Hazra of the Trinamool Congress. They represent different political parties and constituencies across the length and breadth of India. In fact, the Indian Parliament is a microcosm of the Indian sub-continent and it symbolizes, in every sense, the unity, strength and diversity of the Indian people. As you are doubtless aware, the general elections which took place in India last year was the largest democratic exercise of the right to vote in living history. The turnout was unprecedented – and the outcome historic: for the first time in 30 years, the Indian electorate had voted for a majority Government. I am happy to say that as President of India voted to office at the time of the previous Government, I had the satisfaction of presiding over a very smooth transition - from one democratically elected

Government to another. Like the Knesset, the Indian Parliament has all the important functions of a legislative branch that checks the Executive branch of the Indian Government, questions its actions and thoroughly examines its policies. It makes laws and has wide financial powers. No tax can be levied without its approval and no expenditure can be incurred without its authorisation and sanction.

Excellency, Honourable Members of the Knesset,

4. My State Visit to Israel is taking place at a time when relations between our two Governments and our people are on a very positive trajectory. India and Israel, as fellow democracies, share many commonalities. The linkages between our peoples date back to ancient times. The first group of persecuted Jews who came to India landed on her western coast more than two thousand years ago. Throughout their long history, the Jewish communities in India have maintained, developed and enriched their traditions with many Indian additions to their unique heritage. The Jewish people have been - and will always be - an integral part of India's composite society.

H'ble Mr. Speaker,

5. Both India and Israel made parallel struggles against British rule. Our leaders adopted different methods but were inspired by the same human values and ideals. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that Mahatma Gandhi is the only world leader whose photograph had been kept by former Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in his desert home.

6. In the period after independence, our countries travelled different paths. The Indian people have, nonetheless, always appreciated Israeli innovations in the field of agriculture, the *kibbutz* system and the remarkable achievements of your scientists and engineers. We admire the will and resolve with which the Jewish people have risen from the depths of unspeakable suffering and deprivation with a strong spirit and built their nation to make it what it is today - a thriving, progressive and prosperous society that leads the world in so many fields. Whenever the Nobel Prizes are announced, we often see names of scientists who have studied in the Hebrew University or Technion. As friends of Israel, we rejoice in your success.

7. Our two countries established full diplomatic relations in 1992. Since then, our co-operation in different fields has grown steadily. India remembers, with gratitude, the help that the Israeli Government provided in rushing critical defence supplies to India when we required them most urgently in 1999. We also appreciate the support that we have received from Israel for India's rightful claim to a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. India has been a strong voice of developing countries in the UN and other multilateral organisations. India believes that there is no better option than to resolve issues through negotiations and peaceful dialogue. We see that the administrative architecture of international bodies is not effective enough in enforcing their decisions. The United Nations was established at the end of the Second World War. Today its organisations need to be more responsive to the challenges that the world faces - and its structure as well as administrative and financial architecture need reform to make them more reflective of the changed world.

8. India's consistent policy has been to build a strong, substantive and mutually beneficial relationship with Israel. We will continue to do so through high-level visits and exchanges so that India-Israel relations are accorded the utmost priority. As we approach the 25th anniversary of the establishment of full diplomatic relations, we both seek to expand the vision of our future partnership.

9. The Government of India has taken some new initiatives in economic policies and has been emphasising innovation, research and technological development to accelerate India's social and economic transformation. These policies are aimed at raising India's agricultural productivity, promoting manufacturing for employment generation and boosting the services industry. India and Israel can work together in each of these areas.

10. Excellencies, Agriculture is the mainstay of the Indian economy. In this vital sector, our Government's policy has been to grow more crop-per-drop. Our farmers face the challenges of uneven distribution of water - we often have floods in one part of the country while there is drought in another. Our scientists should collaborate to deal with these challenges. We also seek assistance to clean our rivers, particularly the holy Ganga.

11. To stimulate our domestic manufacturing sector, Government of India has launched an ambitious "Make in India" campaign. Israeli innovation and technology can combine with Indian engineering and scale to manufacture in India. Such a partnership, particularly in the defence sector, has the potential of creating new markets and generating more jobs - both in India and Israel.

12. In both our countries, the service sector is growing fast. This is another area where we have complementary strengths. India is one of the largest exporters of software in the world. Every year more than 400,000 English-speaking engineers graduate from Indian universities. The number of start-ups in India is expected to cross 10,000 in the next two years. I am happy that the Israeli Government has opened a Consulate in Bangalore, India's 'Silicon Plateau'.

13. As Visitor of 114 institutions of higher learning in India, I have personally placed a great deal of emphasis on developing educational linkages between Indian institutions and universities abroad. India produces first rate managers and engineers who are highly regarded by global companies. The current CEOs of both Microsoft and Google are graduates of Indian engineering colleges. In the coming decade, the emphasis in our educational institutions will be to strengthen innovation and research. A delegation of Vice Chancellors of Indian universities and scientific institutions is accompanying me on this visit. I am confident that their contacts with Israeli counterparts will result in a variety of partnerships in a range of areas - from space and cyber security to the building of 'smart' cities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

14. India is delighted that Israeli citizens, particularly the younger generation, enjoy travelling to India. They rightly see India as a safe and welcoming destination where they always feel at home. I am told that Hebrew is spoken in some villages in northern India, whose populations also enjoy hummus.

15. The Jewish community in India has always been an integral part of India's social, economic and cultural mosaic. Recently local authorities have renovated the synagogues of Peravoor and Chennamangalam near Cochin in Kerala. These institutions are a proud testimony to the Indian Jewish tradition. I was told by one of the Indian Jews in Israel that his village in Cochin is , perhaps, the only place in the world where a synagogue, a mosque, a temple and a church co-exist peacefully on the same street. The Jews of Mumbai have left their mark on the architectural heritage of the city, its banking world, its literary scene and even Bollywood.

H'ble Members of the Knesset,

16. India and Israel are separated by two seas but joined by their common belief in the power of diversity and democracy. The Knesset has, this year, entered the 50th year of its existence in this magnificent , "green" building. As I extend my felicitations to the H'ble Members of the Knesset, I once again thank you for the honour of addressing you. I invite you all to visit India to further engage with your parliamentary counterparts and contribute to the enrichment of our bilateral discourse.

Jai Hind