

Speech by High Commissioner on 15 August 2017 at Reception

Pehin Orang Kaya Indera Pahlawan Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Suyoi bin Haji Osman, Hon'ble Minister of Education of the Government of Brunei Darussalam.

Pengiran-Pengiran, Pehin-Pehin, Dato-Dato, Datin-Datin, Excellencies, High Commissioners and Ambassadors, Senior Officials of His Majesty's Government, members of the Indian community, ladies and gentlemen,

Namaskar and Welcome.

India completes 70 years of independence today.

2. It was a momentous day 70 years ago, when India won freedom after a long, non-violent struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi. That longed-for day was full of promise for my countrymen but was also foreshadowed by tragedy and difficulties. In the year that followed, the country would face a wrenching dislocation of life that followed the Partition of India. A patchwork quilt of over 500 princely states, large and small, would need to be integrated into the nation. We were a food-grain importing country for a population at that time of 330 million. Adult literacy was a low 12% and we had just lost millions of our countrymen in the great Bengal famine of 1943. But our people were filled with hope and a determination to work for the nation, to prove our mettle and to take our rightful place in the world. And so we set about tapping the unique potential of our people and building up our nation.

3. From that hope-filled difficult but beginning, India is at a very different juncture of her history today. With a population of 1.25 billion people, India has a surplus production of foodgrains and is exporting wheat and rice to the world. We rank first in the world in milk production, accounting for 17% of world production with around 140 million tonnes annually. With 2.4% of the world's geographical area and 4% of its water resources, India's resourceful farmers support 17% of the world's population and 15% of its livestock.

4. India continues to be probably the most diverse country in the world: in 29 States, there are 22 official languages and 1652 other languages and dialects! These states also have different cuisines, social practices, traditional dresses, but there is a civilizational unity underlying all this diversity which crops up suddenly in the Sanskrit lexicon of a language spoken in a far-flung part of the country, in the festivals celebrated countrywide, and which is visible in the ubiquitous saree. India will be the world's youngest country by 2020, with an average age of 29 years. Over 62% of our population is of working age.

5. We in India are proud that we continue to be the largest democracy in the world. Out of 800 million eligible voters, 553 million voters cast their ballot in the last general elections in 2014. We are proud too of our diversified institutions that safeguard democracy and the rule of law: an independent judiciary, a free media and a vibrant civil society. The corpus of laws and legal statutes that are together termed Common Law is practised in both India and Brunei – Indian jurists and lawyers have greatly developed Common Law over the past 70 years to universal advantage.

6. Today India has a GDP in absolute terms of US\$ 2.45 trillion and is the 6th largest economy. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strong and visionary

leadership, the Indian economy has grown with an average annual growth rate of over 7% over the past 3 years.. The World Bank has predicted that India's economy will grow at 7.6% in 2018 and 7.8% in 2019. Other figures provide some insights into the economy: there are over 1 billion cellphone connections in India; 300 million own smartphones and around 400 million are connected online.

7. Thanks to the investor-friendly policies adopted by our government, India has received sizeable foreign investment of US\$ 113.8 billion over the last three years. FDI has been growing by 18 to 20% from year to year – attesting to the belief of foreign investors in the Indian economy.

8. To power this economy, energy use in India is rapidly evolving towards ever - greater use of renewable energy. Fossil fuels already provide only around 67% of energy demand. India has pledged to increase the share of renewable energy from 34% today to 40% by 2030. India is a founder of the International Solar Alliance, a coalition of 121 solar energy-rich prospective member countries located between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.

9. One sector in which India's talent for technology is successfully married to her people's frugality is the space sector. Set up in 1969, the Indian Space Research Organization is headquartered in Bengaluru and its vision is to harness space technology for national development while pursuing space science research and planetary exploration. After many successes over the past decades, India successfully launched a record 104 satellites in one go using the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle or the PSLV in February 2017. Of the 104 satellites, 96 were from the US and one each was from Israel, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

10. The physical, social and economic landscape of India is getting further transformed. I will mention only a few new initiatives which are ensuring this:- The Digital India initiative aims to unite India on a common digital platform by 2019, to make available government services online on a real-time basis, and to set up a pan-India fibre optic network. Under the Startup India programme, the government has established a simple compliance regime based on self-certification and has relaxed norms of public procurement. India now ranks 3rd globally in terms of the number of start-ups and is the world's youngest start-up nation – 72% company founders are less than 35 years old.

11. And finally, a word about the big new change in taxation that has dramatically simplified all economic transactions in the whole of India – the Goods and Services Tax. The Act enabling this tax was passed by Parliament earlier this year. It is a destination-based tax on goods and services in which only value addition will be taxed. It paves the way for a common national market of 1.25 billion consumers and is expected to reduce the overall tax burden on goods from the current 25- 30% down to an average of around 15%.

12. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, there are certainly many other challenges to overcome and many dreams to realize, but India has taken substantial strides to provide employment, education, social cohesion, empowerment of women, electoral representation and sharing of political power from the Centre to the States and down to the villages to all her people. As a nation, we have now vowed to continue this onward march. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated last week in Parliament “the next five years must be about ‘Sankalp se Siddhi, a resolve which will lead us to accomplishment’”. India continues to speak and build consensus on the crucial issues of

the day. This morning at the Red Fort in New Delhi, from where the Prime Minister's Address to the nation is traditionally delivered, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated "the world is with us in fighting the menace of terror. I thank all nations helping us to do so".

13. I will now speak just a few words on the close and cordial bilateral ties that so happily exist between India and Brunei Darussalam.

14. Excellency Pehin, we had the honour of hosting you at our Republic Day Reception in January this year when I had spoken at length on the recent bilateral exchanges between our two countries. I will not repeat those points. I will only highlight that the Government of India will host a Festival of India in Brunei Darussalam from October 2017 onwards to mark the Golden Jubilee of His Majesty Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien, Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam. The Government and the people of India hold His Majesty in great esteem and we wish to express our joy at His Majesty's Golden Jubilee. Some of you will recall the friendly Exhibition Polo Match held between the 61st Cavalry Indian Army Polo Team and the Royal Brunei Polo Team captained by Princess Azeemah that was held in March this year in honour of His Majesty's 70th birthday and to mark His Majesty's long association with the 61st Cavalry Polo Team. The year 2017 also marks 25 years of ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership and we hope to host several events including a car rally, a food festival, and musical events to celebrate this milestone in Brunei Darussalam. In the months to come, we will welcome all ASEAN Leaders in India for a Commemorative Summit. As ever, we are grateful to His Majesty and His Majesty's Government for the support they have invariably extended to the Indian community in Brunei Darussalam. To the Indian community, I will only remind them to hew to the wheel of national endeavour of Brunei and India, and to continue burnishing India's image abroad by their efforts, their talents and their abilities. May the friendly ties between India and Brunei Darussalam grow ever stronger and deeper.

15. Ladies and Gentlemen, we are proud to present on this auspicious occasion, a Hindustani Classical musical performance by a renowned musician, Pt. Vikash Maharaj. Pt. Vikash Maharaj will play the Sarod, a stringed instrument from the Hindustani classical music tradition of India. Panditji has lived and perfected his art in Banaras, a cradle of Indian culture, learning and spirituality. Pandit Vikash Maharaj has also worked since decades for child rights: he is one of the founders of the child rights' organization set up by India's Nobel Peace Prize winner Mr. Kailash Satyarthi. He is an ardent environmentalist, and has campaigned since 1979 for a clean Ganga and since 1982 for a clean Rhine. He is here with his sons, who are all performers on different instruments, Prabhash Maharaj, Vishal Maharaj and Abhishek Maharaj. We welcome them to Brunei Darussalam.

16. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you once again for your presence here tonight to share our joy as we celebrate this milestone in my nation's journey.
