

Speech by H.E. Venu Rajamony, Ambassador of India to the Kingdom of the Netherlands on the occasion of Reception hosted to mark the 69th Republic Day of India

Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam

[January 26, 2018]

GOEDENAVOND DAMES EN HEREN, EXCELLENTIES;

HARTELIJK WELKOM BIJ DE VIERING;

VAN DE DAG VAN DE REPUBLIEK

Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Ms Kajsa Ollongren;

Hon'ble Mayor of Utrecht Mr Jan Van Zanen;

Excellencies, Ambassadors to the Netherlands of different countries;

Friends from various walks of life;

Ladies and gentlemen

Permit me to extend a warm welcome to this reception in honour of India's 69th Republic Day. I am grateful to all of you for having gathered here and I specially thank our Guest of Honour Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and the Hon'ble Mayor of Utrecht for their presence. Please give them a big round of applause.

2. The Indian Embassy is thankful to the National Foundation de Nieuwe Kerk for having provided this prestigious venue where the coronation of King Willem-Alexander as well as his marriage with Queen Maxima took place.

3. It is particularly appropriate that the celebration of India's 69th Republic Day takes place amidst this wonderful exhibition "We have a dream – Gandhi, King and Mandela." The Republic Day marks that day in 1950 when the people of India adopted, enacted and gave to ourselves the Constitution of India. And, the Indian Constitution fully enshrines the ideals that Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela stood for, struggled for and for whose achievement they dedicated their lives.

4. The Preamble to the Indian Constitution says 'We' the people of India have solemnly resolved to secure to all its citizens:

Justice, social, economic and political;

Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

Equality of status and of opportunity;

and to promote amongst them all

Fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation;

5. Ladies and gentlemen, justice, liberty, equality and fraternity is the mantra of the modern day Republic that is India. As India celebrates its 69th Republic Day, we are delighted that our Constitution sustains the largest democracy in the world. In our last General Elections of 2014, 553 million people or 66.44% out of an electoral college of 834 million voted using electronic voting machines. Through strenuous efforts over the last seven decades, India has firmly established within our country, the Rule of Law, a Parliament that reflects the enormous diversity and variety of opinion in our country, a fiercely independent judiciary, a free press and a vibrant civil society.

6. Moreover, India has shown that democracy and rapid economic growth can go hand in hand. According to the World Bank and the IMF, India is the fastest growing large economy in the world, growing at a rate of 7.4 to 7.8% this year and expected to continue to grow at this rate for the rest of this decade. Despite its size, scale and diversity, India has attained an average of 6.6% growth for nearly three decades under a democratic system, with full protection for human rights.

7. India is today the third largest economy in the world in purchasing power parity terms with GDP of US\$ 7.2 trillion. It is the fifth largest in nominal terms with a GDP of US\$ 2.7 trillion. India is also a young nation with over 60% of our population under the age of 35.

8. Since 2014, India has seen a strong and stable government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi initiate a number of radical measures to reform the economy, accelerate growth and empower women and children. The Government has adopted a Goods and Services Tax which has unified our 1.3 billion people into one market for the first time. Improving the ease of doing business is one of the top priorities of the Government.

9. As India grows and integrates more and more with the world, we see the people of Netherlands as our close friends and partners. The Netherlands was one of the first countries to recognize independent India in 1947. It has been a fellow traveller ever since encouraging us along the path of development.

10. 2017 was a special year for India - Netherlands relations with Foreign Minister Bert Koenders visiting India in May and Prime Minister Narendra Modi visiting the Netherlands in June. Investments from the Netherlands into India went up around US\$ 2 billion in just six months of last year. Investments since 2015 has been US\$ 8 billion. The Netherlands is the fourth largest investor in India. At the same time, our economic relations are a two way street. Just as around 200 Dutch companies operate in India, Netherlands is also home to around 200 Indian companies. There is steady increase in the number of Indian business and citizens relocating to this country even as Dutch business and industry show greater interest in India.

11. Last year, Tata Steel, the largest Indian company in the Netherlands, announced its merger with Germany's Thyssen Group. The Headquarters of the merged company will remain the Netherlands. TCS, India's biggest IT firm completed 25 years of operations in the Netherlands. One of our major producers and exporters of Basmati rice, LT Foods opened an ultra-modern rice milling plant in Rotterdam. Similarly, Synthite, the world's largest supplier of spice oils and oleoresins opened operations in the Food Valley, Wageningen.

12. Over 400 years back, the ships of the Dutch East India Company set sail from this city of Amsterdam for the coast of Kerala in South India in search of pepper, then known as black gold. The spice trade contributed in a significant way to the prosperity of this country and its people at that time. Today, ladies and gentlemen, as you leave please make sure you take with you the latest offerings from Kerala, a gift box containing exotic products made for the global palate by the Synthite Group.

13. Friends, 2018 promises to be an equally good year for India – Netherlands relations. Prime Minister Modi met Queen Maxima on the margins of the World Economic Forum in Davos early this week. Discussions are underway to prepare for visits to India by Prime Minister Mark Rutte and by Queen Maxima in her capacity as the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Advocate on Financial Inclusion.

14. Further, we hope to celebrate for the first time the International Yoga Day on the Museumplein of Amsterdam with mass yoga demonstrations and a wellness fair involving food, music and dance on June 17. I thank the City of Amsterdam for supporting this initiative and invite all of you to join us in making this event a huge success.

15. My focus on the positive does not mean I ignore the troubles that confront the world. We live in difficult times. Political, social, economic and environmental challenges confront all parts of the globe. Terrorism has left none of us untouched. The theme of the World Economic Forum this year is "Creating a shared future in a fractured world."

16. In an address to the diplomatic community last week, His Majesty King Willem-Alexander called for united action by the international community to make the world a safer and better place in 2018.

17. I conclude echoing his words and quoting few lines from India's national poet, Rabindranath Tagore, whose poetry won him a Nobel Prize in 1913, making him the first Asian to win the prize.

18. I quote

"Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high

Where knowledge is free

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments

By narrow domestic walls

Where words come out from the depth of truth

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way

Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit

Where the mind is led forward by thee

Into ever-widening thought and action

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake."

19. Ladies and gentlemen, the poet wrote these lines as a prayer for India. Today, it is a prayer for the whole world. Let us work together to ensure that the world awakes into that heaven of freedom. As the ancients of India have taught - *Loka samasta sukhino bhavantu* - May the whole world enjoy peace and happiness.

Thank you.