



Secular foundations of country must be strengthened further: Vice President

Addresses Udvada Utsav 2017

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The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that the secular foundations of the country must be strengthened further and any attempt to create differences in the name of religion by vested interests and religious extremists must be nipped in the bud. He was addressing the members of Parsi community on the occasion of Iranshah Udvada Utsav 2017, in the holy village of Udvada in Gujarat today.

The Vice President said that Parsi community has made invaluable contribution to the country's growth and progress in diverse fields from atomic energy to pharmaceuticals. He quoted Mahatma Gandhi as saying "I am proud of my country, India, for having produced the splendid Zoroastrian stock, in numbers beneath contempt, but in charity and philanthropy perhaps unequalled and certainly unsurpassed".

The Vice President said that India's syncretic culture and ethos form the basis of the country's secularism. He further said that secularism was in the DNA of every Indian much before it was enshrined in the Constitution. 'Sarva Dharma Sama Bhava' epitomizes India's secular ethos. India is a land of diverse cultures and religions, he added.

The Vice President said that the values of tolerance and respect for all religions have been part of Indian ethos from times immemorial. He further said that keeping the tourist potential of the town in mind, the Gujarat Government has initiated Destination Development Project and put in place some basic infrastructure in and around Iranshah Fire Temple. This heritage town is being projected as a symbol of religious tolerance and harmony as rightly suggested by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, he added.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

"I am delighted to participate in Iranshah Udvada Utsav and felicitate two icons of the Zoroastrian Community, Mr. Pallonji Shapoorji Mistry and Dr. Farokh Udwadia. These kinds of festivals and felicitations bring people together to celebrate brotherhood, success and achievements of individuals and provide inspiration to others.

Friends, India's syncretic culture and ethos form the basis of the country's secularism. In fact, I have been saying that secularism was in the DNA of every Indian much before it was enshrined in the Constitution. 'Sarva Dharma Sama Bhava' epitomizes India's secular ethos. India is a land of diverse cultures and religions. The values of tolerance and respect for all religions have been part of Indian ethos from times immemorial.

The secular foundations of the country must be strengthened further and any attempt to create differences in the name of religion by vested interests and religious extremists must be nipped in the bud.

Unless there is social cohesion, communal harmony and religious tolerance, the progress and development of the country will suffer. With robust macro-economic fundamentals in place, India is projected to be the third largest economy in the world by 2028. However, to achieve rapid economic growth and the New India of prosperity and peace, every Indian should work shoulder-to-shoulder in eradicating the evils like corruption, black money, castesim and criminalization of politics as also in eliminating impediments such as illiteracy, gender discrimination and atrocities on weaker sections.

I am glad that the Parsi community has made invaluable contribution to the country's growth and progress in diverse fields from atomic energy to pharmaceuticals. Hailing the munificence of the Parsi community, Mahatma Gandhi had said: "I am proud of my country, India, for having produced the splendid Zoroastrian stock, in numbers beneath contempt, but in charity and philanthropy perhaps unequalled and certainly unsurpassed"..

I am extremely pleased to be in this notified heritage town of Udvada, which is the Mecca for the Parsi community as it houses the famous, Iranshah Atash Behram, the sacred fire temple. I am told that Fire holds a central position in the Zoroastrian religion and is seen as a living, breathing embodiment of the supreme divine. Based on the sanctity of the sacred fire, the Fire Temples are categorized into three types and the highest is the Atash Behram. It is believed that the holy fire has been burning in the Iranshah Atash Ashram for over 1,290 years.

The association of the holy fire with this historic town dates back to 1742 when the then ruler Damaji Gaikwad permitted the Sanjana Priests to settle in Udvada along with their revered fire, the Iranshah.

The town with its focus on Iranshah is distinctly planned and comprises a large number of houses dating back to 250 years, reflecting unique heritage and cultural characteristics. I am told that the Iranshah is maintained by nine priestly families who settled in the town.

As part of promoting pilgrimage throughout the year to this place, the Gujarat Government has appropriately named it as Pavitra Yatradham.

I am told that in view of the tourist potential for this town, the Gujarat Government had initiated Destination Development Project and put in place some basic infrastructure in and around Iranshah Fire Temple.

I am also happy to know that this heritage town is being projected as a symbol of religious tolerance and harmony as rightly suggested by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.

Thank you. Jaihind!"

BK/RK

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