



Speech by the President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind at the banquet hosted in honour of H. E. Mr. Alexander Lukashenko, the President of the Republic of Belarus September 12, 2017

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Your Excellency, Mr. Alexander Lukashenko, President of the Republic of Belarus,

Distinguished members of the Belarusian Delegation,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I extend a warm welcome to you, President Lukashenko and to your delegation. India is not new to you. You have been here earlier. But this visit is very special. We are together celebrating the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between our two countries this year.

And as we mark this momentous occasion, I am reminded of another milestone in our bilateral ties - the visit of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, who gave us our national anthem, to the capital of Belarus- Minsk in 1931.

Excellency,

Our bilateral partnership so far has been laced with much warmth and friendship; our ties going into the future look equally promising.

As two nations with a shared global vision, India and Belarus have stood for respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of all nations.

We both support peace and stability in the world and seek peaceful resolution of disputes and conflicts.

We both forcefully condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and are committed to a strong global response to combat the evil.

Excellency,

Since your last visit in 2007, India has made many strides.

In recent years, India has seen rapid economic progress and initiated a series of flagship programs. It is heartening that Belarus is keen to partner us in our Make In India initiative. Indian companies too are exploring new opportunities in Belarus.

We are happy that the India-Eurasian Economic Union Free Trade Agreement negotiations would begin soon. Once concluded, it would catapult our economic engagement.

Excellency, our farmers owe a lot to your country, be it for the potash we import or the famed Belarusian tractors. These have helped them in agriculture and raised their yields. It has also contributed to our food security.

Our science and technology collaboration is on course. The Grodno power project that we helped set-up, and the role Belarus played in establishing the Advance Research Centre for Powder Metallurgy and New Materials in Hyderabad are shining examples of what we can achieve together.

We must also bring to bear our scientific knowledge to bequeath a healthier planet to our future generations. Your lush coniferous forests and our clean energy efforts can do wonders for a climate smart world.

Excellency, our people to people relations are strong. We share many commonalities. We both play hockey, though on different surfaces. And we both like Bollywood, though with different sub-titles.

And while you draw upon the vigor of Yoga to make your gymnasts do the perfect vault, we strive to capture the beauty of ballet to the rhythm of Tabla.

I am also happy that you would soon begin teaching Hindi at the Belarusian State University.

Excellency, you have been visiting India at an interval of 10 years; you came here in 1997, then in 2007 and now in 2017. I hope we will not have to wait for another 10 years to welcome you in India again!

Excellency,

I once again extend to you a warm welcome and wish you and the members of your delegation the very best.

With these words, Ladies and Gentlemen, I invite you to join me in raising a toast to:

- the good health and well-being of President Lukashenko;

- the continued progress and prosperity of the people of Belarus; and
- the ever-lasting friendship between Belarus and India.

Thank You.

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