



English rendering of the text of the PM's address at the Inauguration of the 14th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention at Bengaluru on the 8th January, 2017

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Excellencies and friends,

To begin with, let me offer our deepest condolences to the people and government of Portugal on the passing away of Mr. Mario Soares, former President, Prime Minister, a great leader of Portugal and a global statesman. He was the architect of the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Portugal. We stand with Portugal in full support in this hour of grief.

Your Excellency, the Vice President of Suriname, Shri Michael Ashwin Adhin, Excellency the Prime Minister of Portugal, Dr. Antonio Costa, Shri Vaju Bhai wala, Governor of Karnataka, Shri Siddaramaiah ji, Chief Minister of Karnataka, Honourable Ministers, dignitaries from India and abroad, and the most important of all, the global family of overseas Indians.

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome all of you on this 14th Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas. Thousands of you have travelled from far off lands to join us here today. Millions more are connected through digital platforms.

This day is a celebration to mark the return to India of one of the greatest Pravasis, Mahatma Gandhi.

This is such an occasion where in a way you are both the host and the guest. This is such a festival where one meets his children settled abroad, your own people meeting you, the meeting is not just for you but for all. You are the real identity of this event, its real glory and its real prestige. Your participation in this event is a matter of great pride for us. I heartily welcome all of you.

We are celebrating this event in the beautiful city of Bengaluru. I wish to thank the Chief Minister, Shri Siddaramaiah Ji and his entire government for their assistance and efforts in organizing this event and making it a big success.

It is my particular pleasure to welcome his Excellency the Prime Minister of Portugal, the Vice President of Suriname, the honourable Ministers from Malaysia and Mauritius to the event.

Their achievements, the name they have earned in their own societies and globally are a great inspiration for all of us. It also reflects the success, glory and enterprise of Indian Diaspora the world over. There are over 30 million Overseas Indians living abroad. Their footprint is all over the world. But, Indians abroad are valued not just for their strength in numbers. They are respected for the contributions they make to India and to the societies and countries where they live. In foreign lands and communities across the globe, irrespective of the path they take, and the goals they pursue, the Indian Diaspora represents the best of Indian culture, ethos and values. Their hard-work, discipline, law-abiding and peace loving nature are role models for other immigrant communities abroad.

Your passions are different, your paths are different, your purposes are different, your goals are different but in all of you there is the same mind, the same feeling and that feeling is Indianness. Wherever Overseas Indians have settled down they considered that place as their work place, and the land from where they migrated as their land of love. With all the success and achievements earned at your workplace, you have come to your motherland, the land that always inspired you and your ancestors. Wherever Overseas Indians have settled down they developed that place but at the same time they also maintained a unique relation with the place they belonged to and made every possible contribution for its development.

Friends, for my government and for me personally, engagement with the Overseas Indian community has been a key area of priority. I have met and spoken to hundreds of thousands of our brothers and sisters during my travels abroad to the US, the UK, Australia, South Africa, UAE, Qatar, Singapore, Fiji, China, Japan, South Korea, Kenya, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Malaysia.

As a result of our sustained and systematic outreach, there is new energy, keen desire and strong drive among the Indian Diaspora to connect more extensively and deeply with India's social and economic transformation.

The remittance of close to sixty nine billion dollars annually by the Overseas Indians makes an invaluable contribution to the Indian economy.

Overseas Indians have the indomitable spirit for the development of this country. They are partners in the progress of the country, they are our co-travelers. You are a valuable colleague, a valuable partner, a stakeholder, in our developmental journey. There was a time when the issue of brain-drain was discussed. Everyone used to ask about brain drain. And I used to tell them; at that time I was neither the chief minister nor Prime Minister, when people

used to say that brain drain is happening. Then I used to ask whether the people with only low IQ would stay back in India? But, today I'd like to say with a lot of confidence that we, who, used to talk about brain drain that the initiatives taken by the present government will turn that brain drain into brain gain. We want to turn brain drain into brain-gain and this will become possible due to the cooperation of all of you. It is going to happen in any case and I am sure of this.

NRIs' and PIOs' have made outstanding contributions to their chosen fields. Among them, there are politicians of stature, scientists of repute, outstanding doctors, brilliant educationists, economists, musicians, famous philanthropists, journalists, bankers, engineers and lawyers. And, sorry! Did I mention our well known Information Technology professionals? Tomorrow, 30 overseas Indians will receive from the President, the prestigious Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards, which recognize the contributions made by them in various fields, both in India and abroad.

Friends, irrespective of their background and profession, the welfare and safety of all Indians abroad is our top priority. For this, we are strengthening the entire eco-system of our administrative arrangements. Whether it is on loss of their passports; need for legal advice, medical assistance, shelter or even transportation of mortal remains to India. I have directed all Indian embassies to be proactive to address problems of Indian nationals abroad.

Our response to the needs of the Indian nationals overseas is defined by accessibility, sensitivity, speed and promptness. 24x7, help-lines by Indian Embassies; 'Open House' meetings with Indian nationals; consular camps; Twitter Seva for passport services; and use of social media platforms for immediate access are some of the measures that we have put in place to convey a clear message that we are there for you when you need us.

The security of Indian nationals abroad is of utmost importance to us. For us, the color of the passport does not matter what matters is the blood relations. In institutions of distress faced by Indian nationals, we have reached out to ensure their safety, rescue and repatriation. Our External Affairs Minister Smt. Sushma Swaraj ji, has particularly been proactive and prompt in reaching out to distressed Indians abroad using social media.

Under the operation 'Sankat Mochan' in July 2016, we evacuated over one hundred and fifty Indian nationals from South Sudan within 48 hours. Prior to that, we evacuated several thousands of our citizens from conflict situations in Yemen in well-coordinated, smooth and swift operations. And in the last two years, 2014 to 2016, we facilitated the repatriation of over ninety thousand Indian nationals from nearly 54 countries. Through the Indian Community Welfare Fund we have assisted more than eighty thousand Indian nationals abroad who were in contingency situations.

Our aim is that for every Indian abroad, home should never be far away. When we were kids, we used to hear, how far is maternal uncle's home? They used to say, it is as far as the lamp is. How far is India? He should feel, it is as far as the lamp is, he should feel this kind of closeness. He may have settled in any country but he should feel this kind of affinity. For those workers who seek economic opportunities abroad, our effort is to provide maximum facilitation and ensure least inconvenience. Our motto is: Go with safety, go with training and skill and go with confidence. For this, we have streamlined our systems and taken several measures to safeguard emigration of Indian workers. About six lakh engineers emigrants have been granted Emigration Clearance online for overseas employment through registered recruitment agents. Online registration of foreign employers on e-Migrate portal has been made mandatory.

And, the grievances, complaints and petitions of the migrant workers continue to be addressed online through e-Migrate and "MADAD" platforms. We are also taking strict action against illegal recruitment agents in India. Prosecution sanctions by CBI or State Police against illegal agents; and increase in the amount of Bank Guarantee deposited by the recruiting agents from Rs. 20 lakhs to Rs. 50 lakhs are some of the steps in this direction. To ensure that the migrating Indian workers enjoy better economic opportunities, we will shortly launch a skill development program - the "Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana" targeted at Indian youth who seek overseas employment.

Sometimes, those who are going abroad for the first time are not much educated; if we conduct a short duration course for them here for their development as per the requirement of that country. Suppose he is going to some country to work in the house keeping sector and if he is trained here he will go there with a lot of confidence. And that is why we are working on this scheme, Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana for value addition to the people going out of India so that they have self confidence in them. I think, the poor people those who are going abroad for petty work, will get a lot of benefit from this scheme. It's essential for the people to learn some sentences, manners and cultural matters of the other country. Even if they are highly educated these things will help them, we are placing emphasis on those things as well that are called soft skills. We are developing those systems because of which when an Indian goes abroad he should not feel an outsider there; he should appear to the natives of that country as someone of their own; his confidence should be so high as if he knew that country for years as if he knew those people so that he can soon set himself there.

Friends. We have a special bond with the Indian Diaspora which is living in the Giritiya countries, who are deeply and emotionally attached with their place of origin. We are aware of difficulties faced by Persons of Indian Origin from these countries in obtaining an OCI Card if they had moved abroad four or five generations ago. We acknowledge their concerns and have made efforts to address these issues.

I am glad to announce that starting with Mauritius, we are working to put in place new procedures and documentation requirements so that the descendants of Girmitiyas from this country could become eligible for OCI Cards. We remain committed to addressing similar difficulties of PIOs in Fiji, Reunion Islands, Suriname, Guyana and other Caribbean States.

Like my request at the last Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, I would again encourage all PIO Card holders to convert their PIO Cards to OCI Cards. I keep talking about this, keep requesting about this but I know that you people are very busy and due to your preoccupations this thing gets postponed. In view of your busy schedule I am happy to announce that we have extended the deadline for such conversion from 31 December 2016 until June 30, 2017 without any penalty. From the 1st of January this year, beginning with airports in Delhi and Bengaluru, we have also set up special counters at immigration points in our airports for OCI Card holders.

Friends, Today, there are about 7 Lakh Indian students pursuing academic programs abroad. And I'm fully aware that every overseas Indian, every Indian settled abroad is eager to associate himself/herself with the progress of this country. The meeting of their knowledge, their science with those of India will take India to the new heights of development.

It has always been my belief and my endeavor that capable and successful Overseas Indians must get full opportunity to associate themselves with the developmental journey of India, particularly in the field of science and technology.

We have taken several steps in this direction. One of them is that the Department of Science and Technology is launching Visiting Adjunct Joint Research Faculty or VAJRA scheme which enables NRIs and overseas scientific community to participate and contribute to research and development in India. Under the scheme an overseas Indian can work for one to three months in an institution in India. And, that too, at good terms and the most important things is that overseas Indians can become an important part of India's progress through this.

Friends, it is my firm belief that connect between India and Overseas Indians should be sustained and enriching for both. To meet this goal, in October last year, on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, I had the honour of inaugurating the Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra in New Delhi. This Kendra is dedicated to the Overseas Indian community. We want it to become a symbol of the global migration, experiences, struggles, achievements and aspirations of the Indian Diaspora. I am confident that the Kendra will become another important platform for crystallizing ongoing efforts of the government to redefine its engagement with the Overseas Indian community.

Friends, Overseas Indians have settled abroad for several generations and the experience of every generation has strengthened India. Young overseas Indians are special and invaluable to us. Like we develop a special liking for a new plant, we also want to develop a very close, deep and strong relationship with young overseas Indians.

To provide the young Indian origin youth with an opportunity to visit their motherland and reconnect with their Indian roots, culture, and heritage we have expanded the Government's Know India Program, under which for the first time, six groups of young Overseas Indians are visiting India this year.

I am very happy to know that 160 of these young Overseas Indians are here today to participate in the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. A special welcome to the young Pravasis- I hope that on returning to your respective countries, you will remain connected with us wherever you are and visit again, again and again India. Last year, the first edition of the online quiz competition for young Overseas Indians called "Bharat ko Jaano" saw participation of more than 5000 young NRIs and PIOs. In the second edition this year, I hope to see the participation of at least fifty thousand young overseas Indians.

Young Friends, will you please help me in this mission? Will you please help me in this mission? Are you ready to work with me? Then why we can stop at 50 thousands?

Friends, today India is moving ahead in a new direction. This is not just a progress in the economy but also covers social, political progress and progress in governance. In the economic sector the FDI norms have been fully liberalized for PIOs and NRIs. And I have two definitions for FDI, one definition is FDI means Foreign Direct Investment and second is First Develop India. Investments by PIOs on non-repatriation basis and by companies, trusts and partnerships owned by them are now deemed to be domestic investment at par with investments made by resident Indians. We have several such programs like Swachh Bharat Mission, Digital India and Start up India through which Overseas Indians can directly connect with the progress of ordinary Indians. There are some amongst you who like to contribute in businesses and investments. Others may feel more comfortable supporting through contributions made to Swachh Bharat, Namami Gange and others.

Still some others may feel motivated to spare their valuable time and efforts in volunteering in India helping the under-privileged or contributing to capacity building programs in various sectors.

We welcome all your efforts that seek to strengthen India's partnership with the Overseas Indian community. I also invite you to visit the exhibition in the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention (PBD Convention) which gives you a glimpse of some of the flagship programs that we have been implementing and see how you can partner with us.

Friends, you must have seen after coming here that we have launched a massive program against corruption, against black money. Black money and corruption were gradually making our politics, our country, our governance weaker. And it is unfortunate that some political worshippers of black money are trying to portray our efforts as

anti-people. I respect, I appreciate and I thank Overseas Indians for supporting the government's policies to root out corruption and black money.

Friends, finally, I would like to say that as Indians, we have a common heritage that brings us all together and no matter where we may be around the globe, it is in that common bond that we are strong. And therefore, my dear countrymen the dreams that you nurtured, those dreams are goals for us and all of us should collectively work to realize them and if it is required to bring changes in the system, to amend the laws, to take bold steps we will do whatever is required to take everyone along. And while doing whatever is required, while doing all these things I say this thing with confidence that the 21st century belongs to India.

Thank you very much.

Thank You and Jai Hind.

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