



Speech by the President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind at the banquet hosted in Honour of H.E. Ms. Doris Leuthard, President of the Swiss Confederation

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Your Excellency Doris Leuthard, President of the Swiss Confederation,
Distinguished members of the Swiss delegation,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you, Madam President, as well as members of your delegation, to India. Your visit assumes special significance as this year marks a milestone in bilateral relations. Our countries enter the 70th year of the Friendship and Establishment Treaty. India itself is celebrating the 70th anniversary of Independence.

Your Excellency, relations between the two countries have been faithful to the words inscribed in the treaty: "There shall be perpetual peace and unalterable friendship." From the quest for clean energy to the quest for a cleaner financial system, our goals are extremely compatible. On the tennis court, Martina Hingis and Sania Mirza have shown us what Switzerland and India can do together. We have to take inspiration from that partnership in other areas.

In this context, your visit and Prime Minister Modi's visit in 2016 showcase the desire of both nations to maintain close contacts at the highest level. You are the fourth Swiss President to visit India. I cannot help but note, you are also the first Swiss President to come to India in a month other than November! I am glad this has given you the chance to enjoy the Indian monsoon.

Excellency, both of us represent democratic and plural societies that believe in the principles of "respect for differences" and "unity in diversity". Switzerland is India's seventh largest trading partner and 11th largest foreign investor. On its part, India is the fastest growing large economy in the world. A GDP growth rate of seven per cent, with strong economic fundamentals, is supported by a reform momentum, fiscal consolidation and a low current account deficit.

There is so much we can do with Switzerland. Your economy is among the world's most innovative and competitive. It is backed by the acclaimed Swiss dual-track education system, with its emphasis on vocational training. These attributes, along with Switzerland's environmental best practices, provide us a number of opportunities.

We can grow and diversify our trade, investment and technological exchanges. Our countries need to pursue even closer business partnerships in priority sectors such as precision and high technology manufacturing, infrastructure, skill development, renewable energy and clean-tech research.

There is scope for creating partnerships between R&D labs and institutions. We value your country's recognition of Ayurveda as a system of traditional medicine. Here too there is room to cooperate further.

Excellency, in a sense our governments are only building on strong people-to-people and business links between our countries. In India, Switzerland is the land of cheese, chocolates and Roger Federer. Given our population, he probably has more fans in India than he has at home.

Your country's beauty is familiar to many Indians as the backdrop for some of our best-known films. This has added to the attraction that Switzerland holds as a tourist destination. In our country, we wish and wait for a similar response from Swiss tourists.

India offers visitors a rich heritage of historical and religious monuments, and a diverse canvas of natural beauty. We are glad you are here, but we want you to come back, and more often!

Excellency, like your country, India is committed to multilateralism. Yet, the multilateral order needs to undergo multiple transformations; namely:

- Reform and restructuring of the United Nations and other multilateral institutions;
- Tackling urgent challenges of international terrorism and radicalism, as well as of financial and cyber-crimes and of Internet governance; and

- Meeting pressing concerns of climate change and attaining the Sustainable Development Goals.

India is keen to build synergies with Switzerland in all of these endeavours, while working within the framework of the rules-based multilateral system.

Excellency, we believe your visit will add substantially to the energy that relations between our countries have acquired. We are different societies, and yet so similar. We share and cherish the same values. This is a partnership of the Alps and the Himalayas. There is no reason why it cannot soar to greater heights.

On this optimistic note,

Ladies and Gentlemen please join me in a toast to the:

- Health and happiness of President Leuthard;
- Progress and prosperity of the people of Switzerland, and;
- Further strengthening of relations between Switzerland and India

Thank you!

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