

High Commission of India
Georgetown

Text of the speech of the High Commissioner of India, H.E. V. Mahalingam on the occasion of the 70th Republic Day Reception to be held at 1830 hrs on 24th January 2019 at Guyana Marriot Hotel, Georgetown

It is my privilege and honour to extend a warm welcome to this august gathering today on the occasion of celebration of the 70th Republic Day of India and completion of 50th year of establishing full diplomatic relations between India and Guyana. I feel certainly privileged to be amongst you for the fifth time in succession during my tenure for celebrating the National Day of India in this beautiful country of Guyana.

Today, Indian economy is scaling new heights with the new government's continuous reform process in every sector during the last four and a half years. In PM Narendra Modi's words and I quote "India is emerging like a bright star in the world" and I unquote. Today, India is the fastest growing major economy in the world. India is on the move from its number six position in the world economy to be among top five economies of the world.

The present Government of India is committed to build a "New India" by 2022 where people can have a better quality of life. All-round work is being done in India to create "Next Generation Infrastructure" which includes, among others, modernising existing sea ports and airports and constructing new ones, expanding rail and road programmes, creating smart cities, connecting coastal areas with territorial regions, developing IT enabled finance infrastructure, etc.

The world today is in an age of a historic transition brought about by technology. From desktop to cloud, from internet to social media, from IT services to Internet of Things, the world has come a long way in a short time. The character of global economy is changing. India, in line with the globe, has moved forward to Industry 4.0 through innovative areas of technology such as Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, 3D Printing

and Robotics, etc. India has also transformed its governance and delivery of public services in the last four and a half years. Some classic examples are : Jan Dhan Yojana, world's largest financial inclusion scheme, under which 320 million new bank accounts have been opened; Ayushman Bharat, the world's biggest health insurance scheme which will benefit 500 million Indians; Aadhaar – which is creation of 1.2 billion biometric identities and the first international remittance mobile app using India's world class Unified Payment Interface or UPI.

During the last three years. India has proved to be a stable economy model in many areas including its regulatory framework. India is shifting from being an informal economy to a formal economy. India has earned its reputation of one of the 10 most wanted Foreign Direct Investment destinations with an FDI of US\$60 billion in 2018. India has progressed fast with its special programs like Make in India, Skill India and Digital India to become a global hub in the field of Manufacturing and Research.

In 2015, the UNGA established the year 2030 as a critically important horizon for the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. India is fully committed to achieving these objectives with its unprecedented economic and social transformation even before time. India has risen to meet the biggest challenge of our era – that is the threat of climatic change in many ways particularly by launching the International Solar Alliance in partnership with France. The other global challenge being terrorism, India looks forward to the global community coming forward to an agreement on India's proposal to the draft put forward in 1996 on the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism at the United Nations.

This year India will celebrate the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi globally and we look forward to actively work with Guyana and other countries of our jurisdiction to make the celebration a great success.

Since the establishment of full diplomatic relations between India and Guyana in 1968, fifty years have passed by. Not only bilateral relations between India and Guyana have been warm and friendly but also we have

consistently held common positions and supported each other in the multi-lateral arena.

India and Guyana have much in common as we share the same colonial past, freedom struggle through peaceful means and our societies being multi-racial and multi-cultural. While India takes pride in its “Unity in Diversity”, Guyana moves forward with its national motto “One Nation, One People and One Destiny”.

The year passed by had a historic significance in terms of bilateral relations between India and Guyana, particularly with the engagement at the highest leaderships at both sides. I may proudly say never ever in the history of bilateral relations between India and Guyana, so many high level visits took place in one single year.

Excellency President Granger visited India in March 2018 for the inaugural summit of International Solar Alliance and had a friendly and cordial bilateral meeting with PM Narendra Modi and meetings with Ministers of Environment and New and Renewable Energy. Hon’ble Prime Minister and First Vice-President Dr. Moses Nagamootoo visited India for the third time as Chief Guest of the Fifth World Tamil Economic Conference in Puducherry in India. Foreign Minister and Second Vice-President Hon’ble Carl Greenidge and Natural Resources Minister Hon’ble Raphael Trotman had bilateral visit in January 2018 and had several meetings with their counterparts in India.

Further more, Minister within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Hon’ble Annette Ferguson visited India for participating in the 1st General Assembly of International Solar Alliance and the 2nd Renewable Energy Investors’ Meet and Expo. The Indian Minister of State for Human Resource Development and Water Resources & Ganga Rejuvenation and Development Hon’ble Dr. Satya Pal Singh visited Guyana in May 2018. Apart from so many Ministerial visits, the Acting Chancellor of Judiciary Hon’ble Justice Yonette D. Cummings-Edward visited India for 19th International Conference of Chief Justices in November 2018.

These high level visits have brought the two countries more closer to each other on many fronts and certainly resulted in blossoming of already existing strong and close relations. The last year saw signing of many MoUs / Agreements on Cooperation in Renewable Energy, Cultural Exchange Programme and Framework Agreement on International Solar Alliance. Guyana has also remained a good friend of India on the multi-lateral front by providing unwavering support to India in all its nominations for the international bodies and Government of India would like to convey its sincere thanks for Guyana's invaluable support.

Development cooperation is one of the main pillars on which the relationship is woven between India and Guyana. The offer of development assistance by India to Guyana is purely based on Guyana's development priorities. Many projects which are aimed at enhancing infrastructural capacities of Guyana such as Link Road between East Coast and East Bank Demerara, Upgrading of Three Primary Hospitals, installation of pumps, supply of ocean going passenger ferry, setting up of an Information Technology Centre have seen considerable progress during last year.

The annual bilateral trade between India and Guyana, as reported by both Governments, is around US\$ 35 million which is far below potential. The trade through third countries for Indian goods and commodities is also equally high and it is expected to be much more than the actual reported trade figure. We are striving hard to enhance direct engagement between the business communities to enhance trade and investment in the fields of renewable energy, agriculture, education, mining, etc and enhanced cooperation in expanding pharmaceutical trade. Last year, the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Federation of Indian Exporters Organisation signed an agreement and subsequently a Guyana-India Trade Facilitation Council was established to intensify engagement. The Mission organised a special event called "Namaste India" aiming at promotion of various Indian items such as sari, spice, tea, jewelry, costumes, cosmetics, wine, etc.

The Indian Technical Economic Cooperation which is fondly referred to by its acronym – ITEC is undoubtedly a popular program in Guyana. I am glad to say that more than 115 Guyanese officials have benefitted ITEC scholarships and other scholarships under ICCR and Commonwealth schemes during the last four years.

The Founding Member status of Guyana in the International Solar Alliance since March last year paves way for access to Indian concessional finance in the area of solar energy. Apart from solar, India is also ready to offer its assistance to Guyana in harnessing bio and renewable energy under its Green State Development Strategy. India would also be ready to provide its assistance in enhancing value addition to Guyana in its forest products, in reforming and upgrading sugar industry and in diversifying rice based products.

India always feels proud when looking at its 26 million global diaspora who have excelled wherever they have migrated to. Guyana is one among such 111 countries. To quench their thirst and desire to seek link with their land of origin, Government of India has introduced “Know India Programme” for its diaspora and I am happy to inform that more than 65 young Guyanese have visited India under the fully sponsored programme in the last 2 years.

I am privileged and honoured to convey to this august gathering that the Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha has been conferred with the most prestigious and coveted top award – Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award yesterday by H.E. President of India and you could see Dr. Vindhya Persaud receiving the award at Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh in one of the videos. I take this opportunity to congratulate the Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha on this occasion.

I take pride in saying that the Indian Cultural Centre in Georgetown, which is now rechristened as Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre, is the first such cultural centre ever established anywhere in the world by India. While more and more students come forward to take advantage of yoga, dance and music classes, I am happy to say that our “Hindi Baat Cheet or Let us Talk in Hindi” and Sari Draping demonstration and Indian cooking

classes organised every fortnight at the cultural centre have become increasingly popular.

While our e-visa system has become popular particularly among those who live in hinterland of Guyana and the countries of jurisdiction of our Mission such as Antigua & Barbuda, St. Kitts & Nevis and the British Administered Territory – Anguilla, we are also most prompt in providing visa at counter on the very same day of application.

The Mission in Guyana is also accredited to CARICOM Secretariat and I am happy to state that India's engagement with Caribbean countries in general and CARICOM Secretariat in Georgetown in particular has deepened as well as widened with generous emergency aid, up-gradation of IT system in the CARICOM Secretariat and its branches in Barbados and Jamaica, assistance in capacity building of its human resources, etc. I am happy to announce that India will also soon become member of Caribbean Development Fund.

I would like to conclude by saying that India eagerly looks forward to continuously work together with Guyana in promoting universal peace, equitable economic development and peaceful solution to the problems being faced by the humanity. Also India would like to join Guyana in its efforts to promote and encourage environmentally sustainable development and its quest for "Green Economy".

I am immensely grateful to our Indian sponsors whose generous contributions have made the National Day reception a really grand event.

Distinguished Guests, may I conclude by proposing a toast :

- To the health and happiness of His Excellency Brigadier David Arthur Granger, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana;
- To the peace, progress and prosperity of the people of Guyana;
and
- To the abiding friendship and cooperation between India and Guyana.
