

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE
ON “INDIA-BHUTAN RELATIONS”**

Convention Centre, Thimphu, BHUTAN: 08-11-2014

Your Excellency, LYONCHEN TSHERING TOBGAY, Prime Minister of
Bhutan,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the very outset, I would like to thank Your Excellency, Mr. Prime Minister for your kind words of welcome. I have been overwhelmed by the warmth of the reception and hospitality accorded to me and the members of my delegation by Their Majesties the King and Queen and the Royal Government of Bhutan since I arrived yesterday. I would like to thank the citizens of Thimphu and Paro and all the beautiful children who came out to greet me. I was deeply touched by their gesture.

2. It is always a delight to be in Thimphu among old friends. Over the last decades, I have had the good fortune of visiting the Druk Yul several times. On each occasion, I have felt a familiar sense of anticipation while flying over the Himalayan ranges towards the pristine heights of your magnificent country . The snow covered mountain peaks below seem to cheerfully remind me that I am approaching an abode of happiness, where economic progress is a means and not an end, where there is a premium on contentment - and where development has not cast a shadow on the preservation of the natural heritage of an enlightened people. I am struck by

the visible signs of socio economic progress and the vast improvement in the quality of life of the people of Bhutan.

3. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, having served in my humble capacities while serving in the Government of India – including at the helm of our Defence, Finance and Foreign Ministries, I have had the opportunity to develop a unique perspective of the India – Bhutan relationship. I would, today, sum it up as an exemplary bilateral relationship between two neighboring countries, a unique and successful partnership for mutual benefit, and a symbiotic friendship between two peoples bound by age-old historical and cultural linkages. Despite the differences in our national situations, we are powerfully connected by our many commonalities and complementarities. Our close bilateral relations are based on our many shared perceptions and priorities. There is a deep confidence and trust between our Governments and peoples and we have ensured that we remain sensitive, as closely co-operating neighbours, to each other's concerns and vital interests.

4. Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen, when I contemplate more on your concept of Gross Happiness and contentment as a part of the economic development and progress, it reminds me of the very ancient saying by sages of India by conceptualizing the welfare of the people when they pronounce,”*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhina, Sarve Santu Niramaya, Sarve Bhadrani Pashyanttu, Ma |Kaschit Dukha Bhag Bhavet*” tthis old

conceptualization of welfare for all, let all be in happiness, let all be in calmness, let all be in good health, let all be in perfect harmony, not sharing miseries and suffering. Mr. Prime Minister! His Majesties, the 4th King and Leaders of Bhutan and people of Bhutan, they have translated this concept in practical reality by preserving and retaining your natural heritage, values of culture and values of humanity.

5. The Government and people of India have always valued the sagacity and friendship of the successive Druk Gyalpos of Bhutan – whose far-sightedness has contributed to the cementing of our relations in an exceptional way.

6. That we forged our partnership in the decade of the 1950s is a result - and reflection - of the converging vision of the leadership of both our countries. The Third King of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck and the first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had not only recognised the infinite potential of our partnership, but taken many steps to reinforce it. The historic journey made by Pandit Nehru to Paro, through challenging terrain to reach here on horseback and the memorable reception that he was accorded by the Monarch and people of Bhutan are remembered even to this day. They are a testimony to the commitment and warmth that existed between the founding fathers of India and Their Majesties, the revered former Kings of Bhutan. Thereafter, in more recent times, the judiciousness and foresight of the successive Monarchs of Bhutan - including Their Majesties the Fourth and Fifth Kings, has contributed

immeasurably towards building a fruitful, collaborative relationship between our two nations for the benefit of our respective peoples.

7. I believe that as the inheritors of this legacy, we are duty bound to nurture every aspect of it and ensure that we continue to build on it and realise its full potential.

8. In this context, I am happy to state that these last months have been marked by a consolidation and intensification of our close bilateral ties. It was an honour to receive His Majesty, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and Her Majesty, Ashi Jetsun Pema Wangchuck in India at the beginning of this year; Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi chose Bhutan as his first overseas destination - within a month of assuming office and I am here on the first State Visit by a President of India after a gap of more than 26 years. We have taken a number of initiatives this year to strengthen our friendship and close co-operation - there is much to be very satisfied about and much to look forward to.

Your Excellency, Mr. Prime Minister,

9. Our exchanges at the political as well as official level and our frank dialogue on all issues have facilitated our mutual understanding and close collaboration in the inclusive development and socio-economic progress of our peoples. We have a common objective of sustainable development, education for all and the development of innovative solutions to address the specific needs of our populations from the grassroots upwards.

10. It is India's belief that it is also in India's interest to see a strong, vibrant and prosperous Bhutan. We are told by our friends in Bhutan that they believe that a strong, united and economically dynamic India is in Bhutan's national interest as well. Thus, we both have proven to the world that our nations find ourselves coexisting in perfect harmony - with our destinies inter-linked in many ways – and yet we remain distinct and independent as we pursue our many analogous developmental priorities. Mr. Prime Minister, in your address also, you have highlighted these issues.

11. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, both India and Bhutan are proud democracies. Whereas Indians had to fight for their independence, the people of Bhutan were bestowed this precious gift by the reigning monarch himself. India chose to be a socialist secular democratic republic. Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of peace and non-violence who led India to freedom from colonial rule, believed in the basic human tenets of freedom, liberty and independence which are at the core of the Indian Constitution. In Bhutan, His Majesty, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth King, himself guided the drafting of Bhutan's Constitution, after a process of consulting Bhutanese citizens across the length and breadth of the country. The Constitution of Bhutan, in its final form, has been welcomed and embraced by the people of Bhutan. They have proven, through two general elections, that the transition has been smooth and successful. India congratulates you, Mr. Prime Minister for your own contribution. We stand by the people of Bhutan as they move ahead as a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. One of the things that I have learned in my long association with Bhutan is - that there is so much more to be learned - from the way of life

and philosophy of the people of Bhutan. You have chosen a growth paradigm that is not purely based on GDP but on the happiness of your people. The profound words of His Majesty, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk left a deep impression on me – when he stated that “*Gross National Happiness has come to mean so many things to so many people but to me it signifies simply development guided by human values.*”

13. Your Excellency ! I could not agree more. In my conversations with students, politicians, professionals , representatives of the corporate world and people from all walks of life in India, since I took this office and gave up active politics, I have been stressing the need for Indians to evoke and rekindle in themselves the civilisational Indian values that have been an intrinsic part of their *dharma* and *samskaras* .

14. It is significant that in Bhutan, the Gross National Happiness principle is the vision as well as the screening tool for Bhutan’s Five Year Plans: its four pillars – (i) sustainable development, (ii) preservation and promotion of cultural values, (iii) conservation of the national environment and (iv) establishment of good governance rely on the full and enthusiastic participation of the people for their success. India stands ready to assist in the realization of these important goals.

15. From the time of Bhutan’s First Five Year Plan itself, India, herself a developing economy, has offered Bhutan her technical assistance and shared her resources to the best of her capabilities and capacities. India is

proud to have been a privileged partner in Bhutan's advancement and growth.

16. Both India and Bhutan are presently focussed on skills development, education and innovation. India has, in the past - and will continue in the future, to offer seats in our premier educational institutions to our Bhutanese friends. Accompanying me is Professor Anil Gupta of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad who will sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Royal Civil Service Commission of Bhutan for, inter alia, advancement of quality of civic administration by training of public servants. In his capacity as Executive Vice Chair of the National Innovation Foundation, Professor Anil Gupta will sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Royal University of Bhutan for enhancing the role of innovation in the education system and economy of Bhutan. Professor Sunaina Singh, Vice Chancellor of the English and Foreign Languages University of Hyderabad will also sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Royal University of Bhutan that provides for academic and consultancy services in English language, learning, teaching and training.

17. I am pleased to announce that we have decided to enhance the value of the Indian Ambassador's Scholarship Fund from current Rs. 1 Crore per annum to Rs. 2 Crore per annum. This scholarship will be utilized to encourage promising but needy students from Bhutan desiring to pursue

higher studies in premier educational institutions in India. We have decided to allocate seats in new areas such as ayurveda and law. I am happy to state that the scholarships offered are at our best educational institutions.

Your Excellency, Mr. Prime Minister,

18. We are also committed to working with the Royal Government of Bhutan to build more educational institutions in Bhutan itself. In the 11th Five Year Plan period, we will assist the Sherubtse College in expanding its infrastructure.

19. Government of India is glad to play a role in the School Reform Programme which is very close to your heart, Mr. Prime Minister . We wish for the success of these initiatives and all your future endeavours for the people of Bhutan.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

20. Hydropower is a classic example of the win-win cooperation between our countries. The three existing hydropower projects have helped to electrify almost all of Bhutan, export surplus power to India and earn assured revenues to further fuel growth and expansion. With the Punatsangchu projects on track for completion by 2018 and the Mangdechhu Project expected to be completed by the end of 2017, the future of power production in Bhutan looks promising indeed.

21. To build on our success, we have decided to also take up 4 more projects as joint ventures between public sector undertakings of India and Bhutan. The foundation stone for the first such project, the Kholongchhu, has, in fact, been laid by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India during his visit to Bhutan in June 2014.

22. Alongside our co-operation in all these areas in Bhutan, the large and growing Indian market holds tremendous possibilities for exports from Bhutan - from agro-processed foods to cement, India can absorb whatever surplus Bhutan chooses to share.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

23. As we move further into the 21st Century, I am confident that the core values of our relationship will continue to strengthen our bonds further . We both agree that our success, so far, indicates the tremendous future potential of our co-operation that we can - and must realise.

24. We can also do more in the field of tourism: the commencement of a flight from Paro to Mumbai has, I believe, led to a significant rise in the numbers of tourists from Western India. 2015 has been designated as "Visit

Bhutan Year”. I take this opportunity to wish the Royal Government of Bhutan great success in this sector.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

25. Culture and religion have a particular sanctity in Bhutan, as in India . Mahatma Gandhi had said – and I quote, “No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive”. The shared Buddhist heritage of both our peoples is a cherished spiritual bond. We were delighted that Their Majesties the King and Queen of Bhutan visited the sacred sites of Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Nalanda and Rajgir last month. We welcome our Bhutanese brethren to visit these places and will try to make them as comfortable as possible.

26. In signing a Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Nalanda University, our two Governments will open new opportunities for Bhutanese students to once again visit the famed Nalanda University. We have had the pleasure of welcoming the first student from Bhutan at the Nalanda University in September 2014. We would welcome the collaboration and support of Bhutan in rejuvenating and reviving this great ancient University.

27. Finally, I would like to suggest that India and Bhutan must take up, with all earnestness, their role within SAARC to move our regional cooperation towards positive and productive programmes for the advancement of the region and global peace, security and development. The forthcoming

SAARC Summit in Kathmandu will be a crucial meeting in which Bhutan and India can work together to contribute to constructive deliberations and far reaching outcomes.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

28. With these words, I thank you once again for the opportunity of sharing some of my perceptions with this very distinguished gathering. We have covered a lot, but many more miles we have to move. We have to go a long distance. And I appeal to Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, let us move forward, let us move together, let us move in harmony, in peace, in understanding.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you !

Tashi Delek !!