

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT
THE STATE BANQUET HOSTED BY HIS MAJESTY, THE KING OF
NORWAY**

OSLO, NORWAY: OCTOBER 13, 2014

Your Majesty, King Harald the Fifth of Norway,

Your Majesty, Queen Sonja

Your Royal Highnesses, Crown Prince and Crown Princess

Your Royal Highness,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a privilege to be here on this first State Visit from India to Norway. I thank Your Majesty for your kind words. I deeply appreciate the warm welcome and the gracious hospitality accorded to me and to my delegation. At the outset, I would like to congratulate Your Majesty and the Government and people of Norway as you celebrate the bicentennial of your Constitution. I take this opportunity to applaud the active role that Norway has played in global efforts aimed at peace and development. Norway's contribution to the recognition of exceptional human endeavour in all fields of activity, through the institution of the Nobel Peace Prize, is an outstanding example of the lead taken by you in advancement of human and civilisational values.

Your Majesty, India attaches great importance to its long standing friendship with Norway. Though our two nations are geographically distant from each other, we are bound by our common commitment to democratic values and practice. We are both open, pluralistic societies that are committed to the protection of human rights and the Rule of Law. We have, over the years, developed mutual trust and goodwill that has brought our people together to achieve our common goals in many sectors. Our bilateral relations have never been better and we are both desirous of enhancing our co-operation to its full potential.

We, in India, recognise and greatly value the contribution of Your Majesty and the other members of the Royal Family of Norway to the building and strengthening of our excellent relations.

Your Majesty, our countries have similar views on many issues of regional and global concern. We have been co-operating closely in the United Nations and other multilateral fora - where India appreciates the support that we have received and continue to receive from Norway. We are grateful for your endorsement of India's rightful claim to Permanent Membership of the United Nations Security Council and for your proactive efforts that helped India achieve Observer status in the Arctic Council.

Our bilateral co-operation has been no less fruitful. We have a very rewarding partnership in oil exploration and scientific research and are both keen to expand the scope of our collaborative efforts in earth sciences, biotechnology, clean energy, fishing and healthcare. I would like to thank the Government of Norway for the assistance and support extended to India in establishing our Polar Research Station in Svalbard.

Your Majesty, you have visited India about three decades ago. India has progressed and evolved in many ways since then. Yet there are many areas where Government of India would like to see more development and inclusive growth. The new Government is taking a number of measures to encourage investments, revive the manufacturing sector in India, promote skill development, develop smart cities and engage closely with all interested partners and investors in India and abroad to make this happen. Business sentiments are positive and strong. While trade between India and Norway has been expanding, it is clear that there is significant potential waiting to be realised. Government of India invites investors and entrepreneurs from Norway to explore possibilities of investment in India's infrastructure sector. We welcome foreign direct investments in our railways, roads and ports, power and communications sectors; we invite Norwegian companies to join Indian counterparts in the "Make in India" initiative of the new Government and we are presently simplifying the procedures to facilitate their participation in India's growth story. We welcome the 'India Strategy'

launched in 2009 by Norway and we look forward to new partnerships and collaborations in areas of our common interest.

I am confident that the bilateral agreements that we have signed will lead to further fruitful engagement in the many fields where India and Norway have obvious complementarities.

With these words, Your Majesties, I thank you once again for your gracious hospitality and invite you to visit India at a time of your convenience. It would be an honour and privilege to receive you in New Delhi.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I request you to please join me in raising a toast:

- To the health of Their Majesties, the King and Queen of the Kingdom of Norway
- To the continued progress and prosperity of the people of Norway and
- To the enduring friendly relations between India and Norway.

Skol !

Thank you.