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Terrorist attacks on India and France are an attack on the fundamental values of liberty, freedom and universal brotherhood, says President Mukherjee

The President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee received His Excellency Mr. Francois Hollande, the President of the French Republic and Chief Guest of the Republic Day at Rashtrapati Bhavan yesterday (January 25, 2016). He also hosted a banquet in his honour.

Welcoming the French President, President Mukherjee congratulated him on the successful CoP-21 in Paris. The President said the growing strength of India-France strategic partnership in defence, space, civil nuclear energy and security demonstrates high mutual trust and understanding between the two countries.

The President appreciated the French President for his leadership and resolute action in the wake of the dastardly terror attacks in Paris in November last year. He said the French President's response reflected the spirit and determination of the people of France to not let the terrorists succeed. India appreciates the support and solidarity expressed by France for India in the wake of the attacks in Pathankot. Whether in Paris or Pathankot, terrorist attacks on democracies such as India and France are an attack against fundamental values of liberty, freedom and universal brotherhood. Terrorism is a global threat and it poses a threat to all nations. No cause can justify terrorist acts. It is imperative that the world act in unison against terrorism, without political considerations.

In his banquet speech President Mukherjee said France made history as the only country to have been accorded the honour of being Chief Guest at India's Republic Day celebrations a fifth time. When the French Infantry troops march in step with Indian troops in the parade tomorrow, they will make history yet again by being the first-ever foreign contingent to do so. This is not just history in the making – it is a testimony to the enduring bonds between our two civilisations and our two people; it is a tribute to our long-standing and strategic partnerships. It is emblematic of our two national mottos: “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” and “Satyameva Jayate”, coming together, with the power to inspire the world to achieve the universal ideals of peace and justice.

The President said the two countries must fight resolutely for freedom from the forces of intolerance, extremism and terrorism. The dastardly terror attacks in Paris and Pathankot have underlined the urgency for countries like India and France to jointly combat this existential threat to humanity and human civilisation.

The President said friendship between India and France is driven by a remarkable similarity in the ideals and aspirations of our people. Our civilizations have interacted with each other over the centuries, united by a shared vision of the world we want to live in - a world that is premised on individual liberty, freedom and equality; a world that respects pluralism and democracy; a world that seeks tolerance and peaceful co-existence. The deep bonds of our time-tested friendship are only set to strengthen in the years ahead, anchored as they are in this rich, unshakeable foundation.

The President said while our cooperation in science and research, education, culture and health is growing, he was glad that the Government of France and the captains of French industry are actively partnering India in our ambitious developmental initiatives, infrastructure, smart cities, clean energy, railways and skill development.

The President said the unveiling of the historic findings of an Indo-French archaeological team dating back to 2.6 million years in Chandigarh and the proposed Indo-French partnership in Mars exploration, juxtapose the incredible breadth of our partnership - from jointly plumbing the depths of history to joining hands to explore the stars and the skies. Chandigarh is also the capital of Punjab and Haryana, a region from where more than a century ago, thousands of Indian soldiers fought France's battle during the First World War and close to ten thousand of them today lie buried in scattered cemeteries in France, having made the supreme sacrifice for the freedom of France.

The President said we have begun the New Year with fresh hopes and dreams and a resolve to jointly overcome the challenges facing us. We live in difficult times characterized by violence, fundamentalism and inequality. But we also live in times of brilliant innovation, of great creativity, of unparalleled global interaction. He said the French President's visit heralds new beginnings in scaling new heights in India-France bilateral relationship and in the common quest for peace, stability and prosperity for all.

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