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Address by President at Hebrew University during his visit to Israel (October 15, 2015)

October 15, 2015

Hon. President (Shri Pranab Mukherjee): Good morning, ...(Inaudible)... distinguished members of the Hebrew Faculty in Jerusalem, distinguished members of the academic community, senate, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I am delighted to visit the Hebrew University and ...(Inaudible)... Institute this morning. It is indeed a great honour for me to be the first Indian President to make a state visit to this site. Since my arrival, I have been touched by the warmth and friendly sentiments of the people of Israel.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Hebrew University for honouring me today with the Doctor of Philosophy honoris causa. I greatly value this gesture of friendship. I, therefore, accept this doctorate as the President of India on behalf of the people of India.

It gives me great pleasure to be associated with this world famous university, one of Israel's largest research and teaching institutions. I am aware of the magnificent library and their famed collection of manuscripts and ancient publications on Jewish thought and culture. I ...(Inaudible)... have the opportunity to see some of these as well as Albert Einstein's archives preserved here. I had the privilege of just being shown a couple of letters written by great Indian minds Rabindranath Tagore and ...(Inaudible)... and some symbols of association of these mighty minds Einstein, Rabindranath, Gandhi and Nehru.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, India attaches great importance to its friendship and partnership with the people of Israel. Our linkages date back more than 2,000 years. As you may be aware, India has a significant Jewish population, descendants from Jewish community who came to India as far as back as 175 BC. Hebrew has been taught as a subject in our educational institutions long before the state of Israel was established.

In modern times, our two people seem to have naturally revived these old affinities and embarked on a path of cooperation that has evolved into a close and multifaceted partnership between our two nations. As young nations with ancient history, both India and Israel seek to develop and progress as knowledge economies.

In the 20 years since ...(Inaudible)... relations, we have developed a close partnership in key sectors of

defence, agriculture, cyber security and advanced technology. I come at a time when India is at the threshold of a new era modernization and economic growth progress.

Our Government has taken a number of initiatives to encourage foreign direct investment and stimulate the manufacturing sector of the Indian economy. The Make in India and the Jan Dhan Yojana for financial inclusion are two of many new initiatives undertaken by our Government.

With Israel, India has a number of complementarities in many key sectors. We are keen to realize the full potential of a partnership between our scientists and researchers. Both our academic communities have much to bring to the table. Eminent Vice-Chancellors of premier Indian universities have accompanied me on this visit to explore and pursue possible collaborations with counterpart universities in areas of shared intelligence. They hope to foster mutually beneficial academic exchanges, collaborative research, and cross pollination of ideas between Indian and Israeli institutions of higher learning.

India creates nearly 400,000 engineers every year. Israel on its part has proven itself in the field of research and technical innovation. India seeks Israel's participation in our Digital India programme and building of India's Smart Cities and modern villages. Your ideas and innovations could go a long way in achieving the goals of these flagships programmes of our Government. I invite you all to participate in transforming India.

Many of you have travelled to India and some of you may be contemplating a visit. Travel itself is an educating and enriching experience. Our Government has selected Israel among the few countries to which it has extended the e-tourist visa destination. We do believe that increased exchange at multiple levels will enhance the mutual understanding between our people.

At ...(Inaudible)... yesterday, I stressed the importance of institutionalizing regular exchanges between our elected representatives. I am accompanied by Hon. Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment Mr. Thawar Chand Gehlot; and a multiparty delegation of Hon. Members of Indian Parliament join me in inviting you to visit India and contribute to the strengthening of friendship between our people.

Since my arrival in Israel I have frequently been asked how India is managing the largest functional democracy despite its huge diversity. For us, diversity is an integrating factor. We see unity in the diversity. India is a complex country of 1.3 billion people, 122 languages, 1,600 dialects, seven religions, and a substantial presence of all three major ethnic groups - Caucasian, Dravidian and Mongoloid. As I have often said, its strength lies in its unique capacity to ...(Inaudible)... according to contradictions into positive affirmations.

In the words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, "India is a country held together by strong but invisible threads. About her there is the elusive quality of a legend of long ago; some enchantment seems to have held her mind. She is a myth and an idea, a dream and a vision, and yet very real and present and pervasive."

With these words, Mr. President, I thank you once again. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

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