



Ministry of External Affairs
Government of India

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Remarks by External Affairs Minister at the Commemoration Dinner for the 125th Anniversary of the historic event at Pietermaritzburg Railway Station in South Africa (June 06, 2018)

June 07, 2018

His Worship Councillor Themba Njilo, Mayor of the Msunduzi Municipality, Pietermaritzburg

Hon'ble Members of the National Assembly

Hon'ble Members of the Provincial Legislature,

Hon'ble Councillors

High Commissioner of India, Mrs Ruchira Kamboj

Mr David Gengan, Chairperson, Pietermaritzburg Gandhi Memorial Committee and other distinguished members of the Committee

Mrs. Ela Gandhi, Executive Trustee of the Gandhi Development Trust

Leaders of various Political Parties,

Religious Organisations, Indian Associations,

Distinguished Guests,

Sanibonani

Friends,

I am delighted to be amidst you in Pietermaritzburg.

It was today, exactly 25 years ago, when the universally adored icon Nelson Mandela gave a scintillating speech at unveiling the statue of Mahatma Gandhi here at Pietermaritzburg.

In his speech, Mandela said and I quote:

**"It is an honour for me to be here to
unveil the very first statue of hope. ...
Today we are faced with the formidable task of reconstructing our country anew.
Now more than ever is the time when
we have to pay heed to the lessons of
Mahatma Gandhi."**

Friends, it was in Pietermaritzburg that "hope" was redefined by two of the greatest leaders of our times.

Both Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela gave "hope" to this earth. They gave "hope" to the enslaved peoples of this world, whether under colonialism or apartheid. They gave "hope" to those facing injustice and discrimination.

They gave "hope" to the developing countries, especially India and African nations, by finally freeing them from the yoke of colonialism. They gave "hope" to generations to come, by ensuring that our values and principles, which we hold sacred, are forever enshrined in our psyche and in our Constitutions.

Friends,

There are very few places in the world which have such an exalted place in the struggle against discrimination and equality for all, like Pietermaritzburg.

The fact that Pietermaritzburg is also the capital of KwaZulu Natal Province, home for the largest Indian origin population in South Africa, adds to its sheen.

They were an intrinsic part of South Africa's freedom struggle and are today contributing immensely to the economy, as this rainbow nation marches towards development and prosperity.

It is thus my honour to be addressing you at this iconic City Hall where legends like Mahatma Gandhi and Gopal Krishna Gokhale addressed a public meeting on November 8, 1912 against the atrocities of the then colonial government.

I am told that this City Hall remains practically unchanged since then.

Pietermaritzburg has indeed seen history being made and, in many ways, continues to make history!

Friends,

Tomorrow, we will celebrate the memory of our greatest Pravasi, that is Mahatma Gandhi, who came here as a young lawyer and transformed into one of the tallest leaders of all times.

One Hundred and Twenty Five years ago, Mahatma Gandhi's eviction from the 1st class compartment of a train at Pietermaritzburg Railway Station was the catalyst to a process, which not only transformed his own life but also shook the very foundations of colonialism across the globe.

Friends,

South Africa was the place where Satyagraha was born. As Mahatma Gandhi explained, a Satyagrahi had to have non-violence of the mind, and seek truth in a spirit of peace and love, so that he encounters truth in the absolute, where he refuses to submit to the wrong or to cooperate with it in any way.

Whenever we speak of Peace and Non-violence, let us not forget that the foundation for peace is laid through the relentless search for Truth.

That's why Truth and Non-violence are indivisible and Gandhi's life was itself his message. When we see turbulence in some parts of the world around us, we always find that the first casualty is Truth. It was during his 21 long years in South Africa that Mahatma Gandhi gave the world this new message.

Friends,

The history of South Africa is full of tales of individuals who gave up their today for a better tomorrow. The story of the people of Indian origin is a story of undaunted determination and courage, as they made sacrifices in South Africa's long struggle against colonialism and apartheid.

In those long years of struggle, the people of Indian origin stood against the injustices of the regime along with their African brothers, undergoing untold hardships. This is the spirit of Ubuntu that we have come to admire in this beautiful country.

This spirit of oneness must be kept alive.

India and South Africa are both a vibrant mosaic of languages, religions and cultures with historical bonds. The relationship between our people stood the test of time.

India provided strong support to South Africa at international forums during its struggle against apartheid.

It was the first country to sever trade relations with the apartheid Government in 1946, and subsequently imposed a complete - diplomatic, commercial, cultural and sports embargo on South Africa.

The recent establishment of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Computer Education and Information Technology at the Phoenix Settlement & the construction of the Kitchen and Dining Hall Facility at the Ramakrishna Abalindi Home at Inanda by the Government of India in your Province underlines our commitment to work for the mutual development of our people.

Today as we stand on the doorstep of a 'New India', it gives us immense pride in remembering the journey of the last seven decades. From being a young nation full of hope and faced with multiple challenges after our Independence, to today when we are among the fastest growing economies in the world.

FDI inflows in India are at an all-time high.

Friends,

65% of our population is below 35 years of age and is hungry for technology-enabled growth.

As Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi said, our motto is: Reform, Perform and Transform.

It has been the constant effort of our Government to engage with Indian diaspora across the world. The Pravasi Bhartiya Kendra which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2016, commemorates the trials and tribulations, as well as the subsequent evolution and achievements of the diverse Indian Diaspora.

Youth are our emissaries for the future.

We hope that schemes such as the Know India Programme and the Scholarship Programmes for Diaspora Children will be able to rekindle their connect with the India of today. I am happy to learn that in year 2017-18, twenty eight young men and women from South Africa visited India through the Know India Programme.

Last year forty eight South African youth including from the diaspora, went on the ITEC & ICCR African scholarship programmes to India.

I was delighted that earlier this year, six Hon'ble Members of Parliament from South Africa participated at the first ever PIO-Parliamentarians Conference held in New Delhi on 9 January. I am confident that going forward, this vital connection will continue to grow.

I welcome you all to the next Pravasi Bhartiya Divas 2019 on the banks of the holy river of Ganga to participate in Kumbh Mela.

We propose to hold the 15th PBD Convention 2019, from January 21-23, 2019 at Varanasi and thereafter give you all an opportunity to participate in the Republic Day celebrations in Delhi.

Friends,

both India and South Africa are marching hand-in-hand towards peace, prosperity and development.

The world is a better place because of us.

The world has much to gain from us.

The world looks up to us to provide leadership.

As both India and South Africa march together on the path shown by our leaders Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi, I would like to conclude with Hindi .

मित्रों,

ये बहुत ही सुखद संयोग है कि इस बार जब हम पीटरमारित्जबर्ग के रेलवे स्टेशन की महात्मा गाँधी जी से जुड़ी घटना का 125 वां वर्ष बना रहे हैं, उसी समय उसी वर्ष में हम मदीबा के जन्म का भी 100 वीं वर्षगांठ बना रहे हैं। ये नेल्सन मंडेला का जन्म जयंती वर्ष है और जब मैं दोनों को देखती हूँ तो दोनों के विचारों में बहुत ही समानता पाती हूँ। दोनों ने रंगभेद और नस्लभेद के खिलाफ लड़ाई लड़ी। दोनों का संघर्ष बहुत लम्बा था। पर दोनों का संघर्ष शांति पूर्व था। दोनों ने अहिंसा को अस्त्र के रूप में लिया और आज दोनों की गिनती विश्व के महान नायकों में होती है। मदीबा ने दक्षिण अफ्रीका में जन्म लिया और महात्मा गाँधी ने दक्षिण अफ्रीका में संकल्प लिया और इसीलिए मैं दक्षिण अफ्रीका की इस पवित्र पुनीत ऐतिहासिक भूमि को अपना प्रणाम निवेदन करती हूँ और आप लोगों से कहती हूँ कि एक जयघोष हम देंगे मैं कहूँगी गाँधी मंडेला, आप कहेंगे अमर रहे।

गाँधी मंडेला , अमर रहे ।

गाँधी मंडेला , अमर रहे ।

गाँधी मंडेला , अमर रहे ।

बहुत बहुत धन्यवाद ।



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