

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
AT THE COMMUNITY RECEPTION**

**Paramaribo, June 20, 2018**

1. I am delighted to be in Suriname. I am honoured to be paying the first ever State Visit from India to your beautiful country. That my visit to South America happens to begin from Suriname is no coincidence. The warmth and closeness of our special bonds have drawn me to you first and foremost.
2. I am thankful to you for your love and affection showered on me since I arrived in this tropical paradise, the “beating heart of the Amazon.
3. Ladies and Gentlemen, Nations are built by brave men and women. But those who built Suriname were made of sterner stuff, of higher determination and steely courage. These are no random thoughts but steady feelings that clouded me as I walked to the sacred Mama Sranan and Baba and Mai monuments this morning. The story of Janey Tetary and the sacrifice of your Fallen Heroes reminded me of our own struggle for freedom - freedom from oppression, servitude and slavery.
4. And the one who led us to it was Mahatma Gandhi, our Father of the Nation. He belongs not just to us but to the entire humanity. We feel honoured that you have preserved his legacy in your surroundings. I had the opportunity to seek his blessings as I began my visit to Suriname. Later this year, we will begin worldwide celebrations of his 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary, including in Suriname. We would seek your support to revisit his life and his legacy.
5. Ladies and Gentlemen, since my arrival in your beautiful country, I have been struck by your biodiversity but even more by the diversity

of your people, your rich history and culture. You are many people, but One Nation.

6. The Creoles, Javanese, Chinese, Hindustanis, Maroons and Amerindians have all added their beauty to your rainbow. The Mama Sranan holds all her children lovingly in her arm, giving equally care and respect to each. Your national spirit resonates perfectly with what Mahatma Gandhi said, and I quote - *“I do not want my house to be walled-in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any”* Unquote.
7. The Hindustani community is a colourful part of the Surinamese fabric. I see them in large numbers here. They carry the stories of the arduous journey of their forefathers, undertaken from Kolkata to Paramaribo, close to their hearts. In the steps of Baba and Mai, they follow their past, their pride and their history. These inspire millions in India as well. The Baba and Mai monument in Kolkata, an exact replica of the one in Paramaribo, is testimony to our umbilical connect.
8. I am happy that the Hindustani community has beautifully assimilated in the Surinamese society and yet, has preserved and kept their traditions and culture alive. The best of India, be it music, art or language has a place of pride here. And the best of Indian cinema is enjoyed by all.
9. Tomorrow, we will be laying the foundation stone of an Indian Cultural Centre. This would be dedicated to the promotion of Hindustani music and culture. I hope other communities would also join in its journey and success.
10. Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted that you are celebrating the 145<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of Indians in this country. But what is deeply inspiring for me is that each and every member of the Surinamese society is sharing the festivities. And you are not just

living in harmony with your communities, but also in harmony with nature. I am told you are the greenest country in the world. Deep in your forests and river valleys, exist centuries old wisdom and traditional knowledge. We should bring them back into our modern lives. I am happy that you celebrate National Ayurveda Day in Suriname. Today, we have agreed to collaborate in the fields of traditional medicine and plants. I hope we will succeed in bringing the best of Suriname and India together.

11. Ladies and Gentlemen, as two developing countries with similar political trajectories, we have grown hand-in-hand. This morning we agreed to enhance and accelerate our partnership. We are committed to sharing our expertise with Suriname for your growth and development. It is in that spirit that we are keen to assist you in developing solar energy projects. We hope these would soon glow, both in day and night, as shining examples of our partnership under the International Solar Alliance.

12. Mr. President, India has many bright stories to tell. We are the fastest growing major economy in the world. The face of India is changing rapidly. From Smart Cities to Digital Highways, from Artificial Intelligence to Big Data, from clean energy pathways to electric-mobility, a lot is happening in India. Let us create new networks of collaboration amongst our youth, our universities and our research communities. Technology and innovation have limitless power to provide solutions for Climate Change, for sustainable agriculture and for managing our forests. Let us work together for progress and prosperity of our peoples.

13. India is taking lead to provide choices for a sustainable, secure and healthy world. Our efforts led to the United Nations adopting a resolution with unanimous voice to celebrate the International Day of Yoga each year. Tomorrow, 21 June, is International Day of Yoga. I am happy that President Bouterse will be joining me in these celebrations. This will be for the first time since 2015 when the UN

declared this special Day that two Heads of State would be celebrating yoga together. This will, indeed, be historic. Yoga is an ancient practice that promotes physical and spiritual wellbeing. It is about bringing a balance between your mind and body, between your thought and action. Come join us in our journey, a journey that as much belongs to you and, indeed, to the whole humanity I look forward to your participation at the Yoga Day activities in Paramaribo tomorrow.

14. Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am amazed at your lingual diversity. We Indians appreciate it more as we ourselves speak hundreds of languages and dialects. I have been informed that apart from Dutch and Sranan-tongo, you speak 20 different languages. I must try my hand at some. In honour of the Hindustanis preserving Hindi in this country, I would like to say a few words in Hindi:

भाइयों और बहनों, आप सब से मिलकर मुझे सचमुच बहुत खुशी हो रही है। यह बड़े ही सम्मान की बात है कि आपने यहां हिन्दी को जीवित रखा है। मैं गर्व से कह सकता हूं कि इस नाते आप सब सूरीनाम में भारत की भाषा और संस्कृति को यहां के विभिन्न समुदायों के बीच फैलाने का काम बखूबी कर रहे हैं। इस प्रकार आपने अपने पूर्वजों के स्मृति को भी जीवित बनाए रखा है। इस के लिए आप सब बधाई के पात्र हैं। मैं आप सबसे आग्रह करता हूं कि इस कार्य को इसी तरह जारी रखिए। मैं कामना करता हूं कि यह उत्साहपूर्ण वातावरण सदैव कायम रहे।

15. And now a few words in Sranan-Tongo : ब्रादा आंगा सीसा में टैग उनु ग्रान तांगी, में विस उन वान स्वीट नेति गो मोरो फारा।

Thank you.