

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT AT THE LUNCHEON BANQUET HOSTED IN HIS HONOUR BY THE PRESIDENT OF BELARUS

Palace of Independence, Belarus : 03.06.2015

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Your Excellency Mr. Alexander V Lukashenko, President of the Republic of Belarus,

Distinguished members of the Belarusian and Indian delegations,

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen,

I am indeed delighted to be in Minsk on this first State Visit from India to Belarus.

I thank you, Excellency, for your kind words of welcome and the gracious hospitality accorded to me and to my delegation. We have thoroughly enjoyed our visit to your beautiful, green and welcoming land. It is indeed a delight to experience the simplicity, warmth and affection of the people of Belarus.

Excellency,

India and Belarus relations have a history of friendly and mutually enriching interactions. As I had mentioned to you during our talks, India's national poet Rabindranath Tagore had visited Minsk in 1931. He had very intense and fruitful discussions with leading intellectuals of your country on international and topical issues of the day. India and Belarus are the inheritors of this glorious philosophical and intellectual tradition.

Since your emergence as an independent nation in 1991, India and Belarus have successfully developed our relationship based on friendship and mutual benefit. Our ties today cut across practically all sectors, ranging from trade and economic cooperation, defence, science and technology and cultural and people to people exchanges.

We also share common approaches to international issues. Our cooperation in the United Nations and other multilateral fora, including in the Non-Aligned Movement has been close and fruitful. This should continue. India deeply appreciates Belarus' unequivocal endorsement of India's rightful claim to permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council. We are also delighted that Belarus fully supported India's proposal to declare June 21 as International Day of Yoga in the United Nations General Assembly. India has and always will appreciate Belarus' approach on issues of concern to it within the framework of international organisations.

Mr. President,

We have had the pleasure of receiving you twice in India as the President of Belarus, in 1997 and in 2007. Your successful visits have contributed enormously in elevating our relations to a higher trajectory and in enhancing the quality of our dialogue.

I am confident that our discussions today, and the various events being held in conjunction with my visit, would take India-Belarus relations to even greater heights. Let me reiterate that India remains fully committed to a deeper and more diversified relationship with Belarus.

Excellency,

Even as we look back with satisfaction at the road we have traversed in building relations between our countries, we also recognise the need to re-dedicate ourselves to a further enhancement and deepening of our ties. We both agree that there is enormous untapped potential in our relationship.

We have discussed several useful ideas and initiatives to enhance our cooperation. It is necessary that we implement them in the most effective manner. I would like to reiterate that we may focus our efforts on our economic and commercial cooperation, our defence ties as well as scientific and educational linkages.

With these words, I thank you once again for your gracious hospitality. I also wish to invite you to visit India at a time of your convenience. It would be a pleasure to receive you in New Delhi again.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I invite you to join me in raising a toast:

To the good health of His Excellency Alexander Lukashenko, the President of the Republic of Belarus,

To the continued progress and prosperity of the people of Belarus and

To the strengthening of friendship and co-operation between India and Belarus.

Thank you very much! [*Spasiba Bolshoi*]