

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE BANQUET HOSTED IN HONOUR OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN, H.E. MR. EMOMALI RAHMON**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi : 17.12.2016

Your Excellency, Mr. Emomali Rahmon, President of the Republic of Tajikistan,

1. It is a great pleasure to receive you at the Rashtrapati Bhavan once again. I warmly recall your previous visit in September, 2012. You were the first Head of State to make a State Visit to India after I assumed office as President of India. Your visit today, on the eve of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our diplomatic relations, bears testimony to the abiding friendship between our nations.

Excellency,

2. You have long been a close friend of India. You come as the leader of a gracious people with whom our fraternal ties date back to antiquity. Tajiks, being the oldest inhabitants of the great Syr Darya and Amu Darya country, have the deepest civilization links with the people of the sub continent. Tajikistan was also a part of the Kushana Empire that covered large parts of today's India.

3. Throughout history, we have enjoyed rich exchanges of knowledge, ideas, secular and religious traditions which have linked our cultures and languages in a remarkable way. Poets and philosophers like the great Rumi, Sheikh Saadi, Amir Khusro Dehlavi and Mirza Abdul Qadir Bedil are cherished equally in both our countries – as are modern scholars like Sadruddin Ayini, Rudaki and others.

Excellency,

4. India was amongst the first to recognise Tajikistan when it emerged as an independent State in 1991. Since then, our co-operation has grown in substance and strength. We value your personal commitment to our relationship which has greatly contributed to its consolidation into a multi-faceted strategic partnership.

5. There is tremendous potential in our economic cooperation. We both seek to expand our co-operation in several sectors - including infrastructure and industry, trade and transport, energy and capacity building. India is committed to work with her friends and neighbours to develop greater connectivity with Tajikistan and other Central Asian Countries by sea transport, road and rail.

Mr. President,

6. India appreciates the close co-operation that we have in the United Nations and other international organizations. We have a convergence of our views on most global and regional

issues. India is grateful for Tajikistan's support for her rightful claim to a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and her membership of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation.

7. As neighbours with a shared vision of peace and stability in our region, we both desire to strengthen our defence and security co-operation in order to effectively address our concerns. The world – and particularly our region, is, today, faced by the growing threat of terrorism. Both India and Tajikistan are opposed to this menace in all its forms and manifestations. Our peoples, as secular and pluralistic societies, desire to live in peace. For us, development and progress of our nations is of utmost importance.

8. We are also committed to assist our mutual friend and neighbour, Afghanistan, to realise the goals and aspirations of its people - through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. I am very hopeful that our ongoing consultations and close co-ordination will succeed in accomplishing these objectives.

Excellency,

9. Your interactions with Government and the agreements that have been concluded will, no doubt, set the agenda for our collaboration in the days to come. As we reflect with satisfaction, on the outcome of our joint efforts in the past, we are confident of even greater success in the future.

10. With these words, Excellency, I once again welcome you. I wish you and your distinguished delegation a fruitful visit to India.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I request you to join me in raising a toast:-

-to the well-being and happiness of H.E. Mr. Emomali Rahmon, President of the Republic of Tajikistan;

-to the continued progress and prosperity of the friendly people of Tajikistan; and

-to enduring friendship and co-operation between our two countries.