

ADDRESS BY KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR, PRIME MINISTER

REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AS CHIEF GUEST OF PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIVAS 2012 JAIPUR, INDIA

Greetings

- Prime Minister of the Republic of India Dr the Honourable Manmohan Singh
- Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Mr Ashok Gehlot
- Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs, Mr Vayalar Ravi
- Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Mr Parvez Dewan
- President, Confederation of Indian Industry, Mr B. Muthuraman
- Officials of the Government of India and Trinidad and Tobago
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen
- Brothers and Sisters of the Diaspora

Namaste and good morning.

Opening

I am deeply honoured to participate in this Pravasi Bharatiya Divas which marks the occasion of the return of Mahatma Gandhiji to India from South Africa on January 9, 1915.

I offer my sincerest thanks to the Honourable Prime Minister and Government of India and by extension the people of India for the invitation extended to me and members of my Government to be present at what has emerged as one of the most important gatherings of people of the Indian Diaspora.

As I stand before you, I am moved by the sense of cooperation and unity that the Pravasi represents.

I am reminded of a well-known profound statement made by Gandhiji who as a member of the Diaspora in South Africa led a struggle for equality of treatment and, then in India, the struggle for the freedom of India.

"I offer you peace.

I offer you love.

I offer you friendship.

I see your beauty.

I hear your need.

I feel your feelings.

My wisdom flows from the Highest Source.

I salute that Source in you.

Let us work together for unity and love."

It is with this spirit of friendship, cooperation and the search for international and domestic peace that I join you here today.

The Power and Significance of the Diaspora

In the short time that I have been in India, I can already feel the warmth of its people and see its rich culture and diversity.

And yet despite the vastness of your country, I note with admiration the sense of community and national pride of the people of India, a nation of over 1 billion strong.

This sense of pride is also keenly felt among the members of the Indian Diaspora.

More and more countries are becoming aware of the power of the Diaspora to contribute not only to socio-economic development in their homeland but also to shape and sustain positive images of the country of origin thus contributing to its international stature.

It is true that today, with the rapid advances of communications technology, we live in an ever smaller global village.

It is thus easier than ever before for countries to reach out to their Diaspora community and establish relationships which can prove equally beneficial to their adopted homes, the countries of origin and the members of the Diaspora.

I feel compelled to note that India offers an impressive example of excellent leadership in the management of Diaspora relations and has in a significant way provided a model for other countries to beneficially engage their Diaspora community.

Through your Ministry of Overseas External Affairs, you have created a pragmatic and effective platform for engaging with the Indian Diaspora around the World.

Such a visionary approach to addressing issues relating to the Diaspora has indeed borne fruit, and today India's Diaspora is one which remains strongly connected and engaged with India.

The potential mutual benefits to be accrued from maintaining close ties with the Diaspora are many, ranging from opportunities for technical cooperation on a national scale to exchanges between schools Organisations and institutions.

Trinidadian Freedom Fighter in India and Africa

Allow me to refer to a most illuminating example of the closely-intertwined histories of Trinidad and Tobago and India as I highlight the significant role played by a Trinidadian citizen in India's independence struggle.

Inderjit Bahadursingh studied at Oxford University alongside Jawaharlal Nehru, with whom he established a firm friendship.

While at Oxford, Bahadursingh joined the University's *Majlis Society*, through which he became immersed in the Indian struggle for freedom.

Nehru encouraged Bahadursingh to 'return' to India in service to his ancestral home, and this he did with great effect.

Not only was he involved in the Indian Independence struggle, but he also remained in post-Independence India, joining the Indian foreign service and serving as Chief of Protocol and as Ambassador to several countries.

Bahadursingh the freedom fighter also became involved in Independence struggles in Africa, where he was honoured with an honorary Kikuyu chieftdom.

Unity Through Diasporic Linkages

This example amply highlights the underlying, key message of what can be gained by reaching out to the Diaspora for any country, and also for welcoming the Diasporas of other countries.

This message is one of international unity- unity that does not stand isolated, but that crosses oceans, that transcends and blends different cultures.

By embracing the Diaspora and embodying this sense of international unity, the ways in which we can benefit and support one another as nations, as communities and as individuals are endless.

Through the many dynamic and active Diasporas across the globe, we are all reminded that the modern world is now, more than ever before, a melting pot of peoples and cultures.

And through significant occasions such as the Pravasi, we are called to reach out to one another regardless of borders or distance to the greater benefit of all.

Diasporas in Diverse Trinidad and Tobago

In my own country, Trinidad and Tobago, we enjoy a rich fusion of ethnicities and religions with a blend of peoples from across the globe: Africa, India, Europe, the Middle East, China.

And I am proud to say that we have come together in our diversity to create the colourful tapestry that is now Trinidadian and Tobagonian society.

While the large Indo-Trinidadian community continues to uphold the cultural heritage of their East Indian forefathers who travelled to Trinidad as indentured labourers in 1845, this cultural legacy does not only remain entrenched in the way of life, ceremonies, dress, names, food and music of Indo-Trinidadians, but it is also entrenched in the broader Trinbagonian culture.

Children of all races and religions light deyas in honour of Divali, just as Trinbagonians regardless of ethnicity dance to the beat of a tassa drum and the rhythm of Trinidad's own hybrid chutney soca beat.

This is the true beauty of a Diaspora: the ability to maintain the culture of the land of origin and seamlessly incorporate it into the fabric of a new home, thereby enriching the culture of the receiving country.

Trinidad and Tobago stands as a true testament to this, where the cultural legacies of Africans, Chinese, Indians, Europeans and many more do not merely co-exist, but they come together to create a culture that is vibrant and dynamic.

Caribbean East Indians have held Mahatma Gandhi in high esteem and from the 1930s there were repeated initiatives for him to visit Trinidad and Tobago but sadly he was not able to accept. However, in 1945 when a group of young Trinidadians decided to publish the Indian Centenary Review, commemorating the first century of their presence in their new homeland, they immediately asked Bapuji for a message on that occasion. Gandhiji responded promptly on the 25th of April 1945 and in his message he wisely advised our population “domicile Indians prove worthy of the motherland .

That reinforces my view that there is only one Mother, mother Trinidad and Tobago, there is no mother India, Africa, China, Europe. But there is Grandmother India, grandmother Africa, grandmother China, grandmother Europe. We all know the Great love that we hold for our Grandmothers. As a grandmother of Shiva Kristiano Bissessar and Kavita Sofie Bissessar I am experiencing the wonder and love of my grandchildren as I acknowledge their love. A very special kind of love.

Trinidad and Tobago Partnering with India

As our own population with its unique cosmopolitan culture continues to grow and make its mark in different countries across the World, my Government looks to the example of the Government of India so that we too may remain closely interconnected with our budding Diasporic community.

However, Trinidad and Tobago's bilateral relations with India go far beyond simply drawing upon your efforts to engage the Indian Diaspora.

Our technical cooperation, trade and investment linkages and of course our longstanding historical ties which date back to the 19th century have all contributed to the present excellent relationship between our two countries, which is characterised by mutual support and respect.

Within the recent past, the interest in India by people in my country has been heightened.

This is so not only because of the emergence of India as a super power and economy, but also because of the excellent diplomatic relations shared between our countries and the frequency of cultural visits, technical cooperation and academic exchanges at the level of our Universities.

India has been and continues to be a great friend of Trinidad and Tobago and has extended this hand of friendship by providing hundreds of scholarships for our nationals to train in world class Indian Institutions.

For too long we have looked upon the former colonial masters for the answers to our problems; we must now also look inwards, tapping the vast latent resources which we undoubtedly possess.

When our first Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, met India's first Prime Minister in New Delhi, they discussed these very issues and the initial results of those discussions was the establishment of an Institute for Afro Asian studies at the Trinidad campus of the University of the West Indies.

Today the work started by that Institute has grown considerably and the Indian inputs have steadily increased.

It is now incumbent upon us maintain that dream of our founding fathers.

I have always regarded India as one area of light, of knowledge and wisdom.

Today, India has demonstrated this in no small way by its contribution not only to spiritual well being across the globe, but emerging as one of the fastest growing economies.

It has provided a model for social and economic transformation which developed countries grappling with issues of financial and economic sustainability as well as long term growth and the ability to attract direct foreign investments may well choose to study.

In particular, India has a lot to teach the world in terms of how to attain food security, as well as to make affordable computers and I-Pads which are basic tools in generating creativity and international competitiveness.

India perhaps understands and fully appreciates the fact that human development which combines the spiritual and the secular is the key to improving the quality of life in any society.

Even as India grows its economy at home, Trinidad and Tobago provides an excellent opportunity for Indian entrepreneurs and investors to set up manufacturing and service industries in my country where we are committed to a program of diversification and are offering attractive incentives to investors.

Further, Trinidad and Tobago has a number of trade agreements which will allow for market access into the 600 million Central and Latin American markets.

For those of us who may be unaware of Trinidad and Tobago, we are the world's number one exporter of methanol and at times urea.

In fact the largest methanol plant in the world is located in Trinidad and Tobago.

With one hundred years of experience in oil exploration and our technological savvy in gas monetization, TT and India can develop a strong partnership to assist emerging oil and gas nations in the south, thus giving life to the much touted South-South Cooperation and Trade.

Mini-PBD in Trinidad and Tobago

I am aware that the Pravasi is meant to examine in the main the contribution of the Indian Diaspora to India's development.

However I wish to sincerely urge that consideration be given to the holding of a Pravasi in the Caribbean and for which I pledge the support of my country.

In so doing we shall share new understandings, and develop appreciation for the Diaspora in their adopted homelands.

Even as India benefits and develops from the annual Pravasi in India, other countries especially small island nations will also benefit by way of a Pravasi in their countries. **I speak here of the Trinidad Diaspora which resides in every country of the world, and can be found in the UK, Canada, and the USA.**

It will become a type of pilgrimage that combines tourism, education and business development.

Closing

Prime Minister, you have paid Trinidad and Tobago and me great honour by having me as your Chief Guest.

I am deeply inspired by what is happening here today, inspired by the unity of purpose of this gathering which speaks of a desire to contribute through the application of one's skills and resources for the benefit of humanity.

I see in this Pravasi the spirit of yagna, selfless sacrifice for the community's well being and I applaud and draw inspiration from such commitment.

As I commend this important opportunity for the Indian Diaspora to come together with the Government of India, I wish to leave you all with the simple words of Rabindranath Tagore:

“You can't cross the sea merely by standing and staring at the water”.

In order to effectively reach out to one another, to the members of our Diasporic communities, to nations, to our neighbours, we must be proactive.

We must not restrict ourselves to mere words, to 'standing and staring at the water', but instead we must take the initiative to reach out across the sea to one another to create a stronger, more tight-knit and supportive international community.

May God continue to bless each of you.

May God continue to bless both our nations.

May God continue to bless the nations from which the Diaspora have gathered.

May we pledge to work for the mutual benefit of the people of our own countries and the world.

End.