

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE
TO THE PARLIAMENT OF FINLAND**

HELSINKI, FINLAND : OCTOBER 16, 2014

Your Excellency Mr. Eero Heinaluoma, Speaker of the Finnish Parliament,

Honourable Deputy Speakers Mr. Pekka Ravi and Mr Anssi Joutsenlahti

Honourable members of the Parliament of Finland,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for your kind words of welcome. It is indeed a great privilege for me to be here and to address you in this august and historic House of the People.

I extend to all the Honourable Members of The Eduskunta and through you, to the people of Finland, the warm greetings of the people of the Republic of India.

As the first country to give the right to vote and the right to stand for elections to all citizens of eligible age - regardless of wealth, race or social class, you are an exemplary democracy. It is well known that Finnish women were the first in the world to receive full political rights, including the right to stand for elections as well as the right to vote. As a result, it was as long ago as 1907 that the first batch of women was elected to your Parliament.

Excellency,

There is another reason that I feel very much at home here. Having participated intensely in the deliberations and activities of the Indian Parliament for more than four decades, it gives me great pleasure to visit other great Parliaments of the world.

I am particularly happy to be accompanied today by the Honourable Minister of State for Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises of the Government of India, Shri P. Radhakrishnan and a delegation of Honourable Members of Parliament from both Houses of the Indian Parliament comprising Shri Rajeev Shukla, Shri Anant Kumar Dattatreya Hegde, Dr. Kirit Premjibhai Solanki and Shri Babul Supriyo Baral.

The Honourable Members accompanying me represent different political parties, regions, ethnic groups and sections of the Indian society. Our Parliament is a microcosm of India and symbolizes, in every sense, the unity, strength and diversity of the Indian people. As you may be aware, the recent elections in India were the largest democratic exercise of the right to vote in living history – we had a record turnout and the results were equally historic: for the first time in 30 years, the Indian electorate voted in a majority Government.

Excellency, Honourable Members of the Eduskunta,

My State Visit is taking place at a time when relations between our two Governments and our people have never been better. India and Finland have always shared close and cordial relations based on a shared commitment to strong multi-party democracy, open societies, rule of law, free press and independence of the judiciary. Since the visit of our first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to Finland in 1957, we have sustained a tradition of regular contacts and exchanges at both the political and official levels. This has contributed to enhanced mutual understanding between our Governments and peoples.

Our points of view converge on many global and regional issues. India deeply appreciates Finland's support for India's candidature for a permanent seat in an expanded United Nations Security Council.

We are committed to working closely with peace-loving nations to address regional and global issues of common interest including urgent issues such as combating terrorism, mitigating the effects of climate change and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. India counts on the continued support of Finland in multilateral fora.

India is happy to be an Observer of the Arctic Council. We are committed to further deepening its engagement with Member States

and Permanent Participants. India will continue to deploy its significant polar research capabilities and scientific understanding for strengthening the work of the Arctic Council.

At the bilateral level, we, in India, expect to intensify our ongoing co-operation with Finland in specific areas of shared interest and complementarities. Despite the global economic downturns there has been substantial growth in our economic and commercial relations, particularly in sectors such as oil and gas, shipping and maritime industries, renewable energy and IT services. Our two-way trade has crossed the 1 billion Euro mark. This, however, is not a reflection of the true potential for bilateral trade and commerce that exists between our two economies. I am confident that in the coming years there shall be far greater engagement between us in all areas- economic, geo-political, social and cultural. Our Government's manifest desire to engage more substantively with the Nordic region cannot be conveyed better than through the composition of my delegation - which includes eminent educationists, scientists and businessmen. We hope to move forward with renewed vigour in all these areas.

Finland's technology in areas such as communications and information technology, energy, shipbuilding, manufacturing, biotechnology, environment, healthcare and infrastructure services is amongst the best in the world. India would like to take advantage of your expertise in these areas.

The new Government in India is focused on growth and creation of employment opportunities. It is taking measures to encourage investments, revive the manufacturing sector in India, promote skills development, develop smart cities, address social issues and engage closely with partners in these areas. Business sentiments are positive and strong; it is a period of opportunity in India. Almost 100 Finnish companies have invested over one billion euros in India in sectors such as environment and energy. Our bilateral co-operation in the field of science and technology, particularly biotechnology, has been exceedingly successful. Going forward, Finland could take advantage of the "Make in India" campaign which seeks to position India as a global manufacturing hub through a series of positive policy interventions.

Excellency, India is a young nation with 65% of the population below the age of 35 years. Upgrading their skills is a high priority for us. I am very pleased that during this visit several MOUs and agreements for co-operation are being signed between our premier educational institutions and Finnish Universities that will contribute to India's efforts in this direction.

India very much looks forward to intensifying the exchanges between our peoples. Our Parliamentarians and the India- Finland Parliamentary Friendship Group can, and must, play an instrumental role in this process. In this context, you will be

interested to know, India has included Finland among the countries for whose citizens tourist visas can be issued on arrival. Finn Air's direct daily flights to Delhi and Mumbai will facilitate our tourism and business links.

Excellency, I am optimistic and confident that the trust and fruitful co-operation between our Governments and peoples will further strengthen to our mutual benefit in the years to come.

I thank you once again for inviting me to address this House. It is my pleasure to invite you and the distinguished Parliamentarians to visit India to get to know our land and our people.

I wish you and the Honourable Members of Parliament every success in your endeavours for the people of Finland.

Thank you.