

**Speech by H.E. Venu Rajamony, Ambassador of India to the Netherlands at special function organized by Embassy of India and NIA to mark the 71th anniversary of India's independence, August 15, 2017, The Hague**

It is with great joy and pride that I stand before you at this special event jointly organized by the Embassy of India, the Netherlands India Association and other community organizations to mark the 71st anniversary of India's independence.

I am grateful to the Hon'ble Mayor of The Hague, SG of the MFA, distinguished Ambassadors, their spouses and all others who have gathered here to celebrate with us and make this evening memorable. This is the fifth year NIA has brought together various organisations to celebrate the Independence Day in this format. This is first time the Embassy is joining this effort. Our coming together is most appropriate because this year is a special anniversary. It is 70 years since our independence, also 70 years since diplomatic relations was established between India and Netherlands. The NIA represents the people of Netherlands and India.

It is the people of India who fought and won for India her freedom. It is they who have safeguarded this freedom over 70 years and it is they who will guide the destiny of the nation in the future.

The participation of the people of the Netherlands in this celebration is particularly significant because the Ambassador of Netherlands was one amongst three Ambassadors present in Delhi that historic moment when the British flag came down and the Indian flag went up, when our first PM, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru made his famous speech at the stroke of the midnight hour in the Central Hall of Parliament.

Ladies and gentlemen, in this speech, PM Nehru said "*A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. He also said, "the achievement we celebrate today, is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us. Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future?"*

Anniversaries are occasions for stock taking. Where did India start? Where has it reached? What distance remains?

In my view, consolidating India's unity and integrity, making a success of our nation building experiment is the single most important achievement of India. It is well known that India is a country of enormous diversity, a sub-continent rolled into one nation. Every known religion in the world is present in our country. Over hundred different languages and 1600 dialects are used in everyday life. Every State has its own culture, history, food, dress and traditions.

India was born desperately poor and in the midst of partition, communal carnage and one of the largest refugee movements in recorded history. Over 6 million people from Pakistan came to India. The colonial power did not make things easy. Directly ruled areas were divided on the basis of religion and 562 Princely States or kingdoms were given the opportunity to choose to be independent or join India or Pakistan. 70 years after independence, we can say with confidence 1.3 billion are welded together into one strong nation.

Secondly, India is proud to be the largest democracy in the world. The first task the new nation did was to adopt a Constitution which sets itself the goal of securing to all the citizens- justice, social economic and political and guarantees liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship.

67 years after adoption and 70 years of the independence, the Indian Constitution stands strong and tall. The institutions created by it such as the independent judiciary, autonomous election Commission, free press and vibrant civil society are our pride and the pillars on which our democracy exists. India has seen general elections to the Parliament 16 times. While governments have changed, never has the result been questioned. In Europe, there are countries which have succumbed to military rule and subversion of constitutions. Never in India. Friends, the last election held in 2014 had as its electorate around 840 million people. 551 million people actually voted using electronic voting machines.

Thirdly, India's economic growth rate was 0% to 1% during the 50 years before Independence under colonial rule. In the last decade, our growth rate has averaged around 8%, making us the fastest growing large economy of the world. IMF now estimates that India will grow at 7.2% in 2017-18 and 7.7% in 2018-19. What was a desperately poor country in 1947, is today the third largest economy in the world in Purchasing Power Parity terms with a GDP of 7.2 trillion and US \$2.7 trillion in

nominal terms. Our annual per capita income has grown 27 times. Poverty levels have declined from over 60 percent to less than 25 percent. Life expectancy has doubled. Literacy has gone up from 18 to 74 percent.

In the early days of independence we had to survive on gifts and import of food grains from wealthy countries. Today, we not only produce enough to feed ourselves but are also exporting the same. India is the second largest producer in the world of wheat, rice, fruits, vegetables, sugarcane and oil seeds. She is the largest producer of milk, pulses, spices, tea and cashew. In 1947, India had hardly any industry worth its name. Today, India is among top ten manufacturing nations of the world.

Our space programme put a record 104 satellites into orbit from a single rocket in February this year including one from the TU Delft of Netherlands. Not only have we reached the moon, we have also reached the Mars. We are one of four in the World to do so. This was achieved in the very first attempt and at a cost less than the cost of production of the Hollywood film 'Gravity'.

Lest you think India's success is only in the field of economy and technology, let me mention that we do not neglect education and our children. India has the largest mid-day meal scheme for students serving 10 million children in over 1 million schools.

Finally, India's culture and traditional knowledge continue to gain growing number of fans across the world. Indian food, yoga, traditional medicine, music, dance and movies are known everywhere. Netherlands, alone has around 160 Yoga schools and 100 Indian restaurants. India every year produces the largest number of movies in the world, higher than Hollywood.

Friends, I have elaborated on these achievements in detail, but I do so with humility. I am conscious and India recognizes that there is much distance that remains to be covered.

We are aware that there is little room for complacency. The strength of any democratic society lies in its ability to introspect, acknowledge mistakes, course correct and re-order priorities.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called upon the people to make a new India by 2022 free of poverty, dirt, corruption, terrorism, casteism and communalism. The Government has launched with tremendous energy and enthusiasm a number of flagship schemes such as the clean India, clean Ganges, smart cities, Make in India, Startup India, Beti Bachao, Beti Padao. These reveal the areas where we think India needs to do much better and at the same time the confidence that we can transform India within short span of time.

Ladies and gentlemen, India approaches its 71st Independence Day with legitimate pride and faith in future. We are one of the youngest nations in the world. India's diversity and long tradition of tolerance and pluralism constitute the essence of the idea of India and we are determined to preserve and nurture it at all times.

India is a country which has been always open to the world and welcomed those from abroad into our midst. Our struggle for freedom was a struggle not just to liberate ourselves but to liberate all suppressed people anywhere in the world. Our success and achievements are not just for our benefit but for the whole world. Our ancients have taught us *Loka Samasta Sukhino Bhavantu*. When we chant the '*Shanti*' mantra, we pray not only for human beings but for every living creature including plants and mother earth herself.

India believes it can and must make a contribution to addressing the challenges that the world confronts, whether it be poverty, terrorism, climate change, tackling natural disasters and pandemics. It stands ready to work with the rest of the world and opposes all efforts to divide people into fragments through the building of narrow domestic walls.

As we complete 70 years, we are delighted that our friendship with the people and the Government of Netherlands has gone from strength to strength. We share common values and are committed to the same national and international goals. Our relations stand poised to climb even greater heights in the coming days. India provides the Netherlands a huge economic opportunity. Netherlands has important strengths in the areas that India has greatest needs.

A special bridge which connects the two countries together is the Indian community in Netherlands. Members of this community are educated,

hardworking, law abiding and well integrated into local communities. I salute them and pay tribute to their success and achievements.

I urge them to do their utmost for the economy of this country and welfare of its people.

Hon'ble Mayor, Madam Pauline Krikke, I assure you that the Indian community as well as the Govt of India stand ready to strengthen your hands in all your endeavors and support you in every which way possible.

**Jai Hind**