

**Ambassador's speech at Milan Summer Festival
5 August 2022**

National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism, Rabin Baldevsingh,

Ambassador of Suriname, Excellency Rajendre Khargi,

Chairman of Milan Summer Festival, Anand Moelchand,

Secretary of Milan Summer Festival, Hemant Lachman,

Ladies and gentlemen.

It is a pleasure to join you for the inauguration of the Milan Summer Festival, more so because it is taking place after a gap of 2 years due to Covid-19 situation. I am happy to note that since 1985 this event continues to be celebrated every year with great warmth, friendliness and brotherhood with which it started long back. I would like to congratulate the organizers for this excellent initiative.

Friends, the Indian diaspora numbering over 30 million around the world, reflects the full multiplicity and variety of the rich cultural, social, ethnic and religious tapestry of India. Members of the Indian Diaspora have done remarkably well in all fields of life and in all regions of the world.

We are proud that the Indian Diaspora in the Netherlands too is an important part of the Dutch society and is not only making a significant contribution to the Dutch economy but also acting as a bridge for cementing and promoting India-Netherlands relations.

The Hindustani-Surinami community is carrying forward the tradition of nurturing and preserving the cultural heritage of India. The celebration of the Milan Festival is a good way to pass on our values and cultural traditions to the younger generation.

I am happy that this year's Milan Festival is coinciding with the 75th year of India's independence. We are celebrating 75 years of freedom from colonial rule as Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav in India and around the world. Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav commemorates the glorious history of the Indian people, their culture and achievements. This Mahotsav is dedicated to the people of India who have not only been instrumental in bringing India thus far in its evolutionary journey but also hold within them the power and potential to enable India to achieve its vision of building a new Atma Nirbhar Bharat.

The Indian diaspora has played a significant role in raising India's image and prestige abroad. Over the years, the GOI's engagement with the Indian community has increased manifold. Government has taken several initiatives to connect with the Indian diaspora abroad like providing OCI cards, organizing youth familiarization programmes such as Know India Programme and giving scholarships for children.

Friends, you are all aware of the close relations between India and the Netherlands. Our bilateral ties are wide-ranging and multi-faceted. They have been marked by frequent exchange of high level visits. Most recently, the President of India paid a state visit to the Netherlands coinciding with 75 years of diplomatic relations between India and the Netherlands. Over these 75 years, we have seen India-Netherlands relations grow into a vibrant and multi-dimensional partnership anchored in a strong foundation of friendship and understanding. Today our relations have evolved not only at the government to government level but have a deep people-to-people connect. Today we have the largest Indian diaspora in mainland Europe based in the Netherlands. Our trade and investments have grown significantly, with increasing presence of Indian companies in Netherlands. Large number of Indian students and research scholars are coming to study in Dutch universities. This positive growth trajectory is bound to make India-Netherlands relations even stronger and more deep-rooted in the years to come. The Hindustani-Surinami community will be celebrating an important milestone next year and I am sure your contribution will continue to play a significant role in cementing India-Netherlands ties.

I would like to conclude by once again congratulating the organizers of the Milan Festival for the excellent arrangements and wish them all success. I am happy that the Embassy is participating in the Festival with a stall where

visitors can get information about activities of the Gandhi Centre, tourism and other programmes. I hope visitors to the Festival will take advantage of it.

Thank you.

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