

**National Day Reception – Address by Ambassador**  
(Thursday, January 26, 2023)

- Secretary General, Excellency Mr. Paul Huijts
- Distinguished guests from the Government of the Netherlands
- Fellow Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Heads and Representatives of International Organizations
- Members of the Indian Community
- Ladies and gentlemen

It is my pleasure to welcome you all for the celebration of the 74<sup>th</sup> Republic Day of India. It was on 26 January 1950 that the Constitution of independent India came into effect, declaring India a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic. As the supreme law of the country, the Constitution provides a strong foundation for India's democratic framework. Over the years, it has been a guiding light in our endeavors to become a progressive and forward-looking nation.

2. Today, India is the world's largest democracy, whose voice and message hold significance in the global arena. As home to one-sixth of humanity, with two thirds below the age of 35, India has the potential to become the knowledge & skill capital of the world, driving global growth and development. As the world's fifth largest and fastest growing economy, India is leading the way in software, digital technologies, start-ups, Fintech and innovation. India is fast becoming a global manufacturing hub, making exceptional advances in a number of sectors.

3. Today, India is at the forefront of providing solutions to complex problems. It is no small achievement that India was able to administer a record 2.2 billion Covid vaccine doses to its citizens free of cost with indigenously produced vaccines, and also supplied vaccines and other medicines to more than 100 countries during the pandemic. While recognizing the extraordinary achievements thus far, we recognize the work ahead of us and are now preparing ourselves for the next 25 years of our journey to transform India into a prosperous and developed economy.

4. This sense of optimism towards the future also resonates in our approach to global issues as India goes forward with its G20 Presidency this year. We see the Presidency as not only a big responsibility but also a great opportunity for India to demonstrate its leadership in a number of important areas like lifestyle for environment, energy transition, women-led development, digital infrastructure, and reformed multilateralism.

5. In 2022, India and Netherlands celebrated 75 years of diplomatic relations. Our strong bilateral ties are firmly rooted in shared values of freedom and democracy, and have witnessed a sustained growth over the years. Both countries are strong partners in tackling the challenges of the present, and jointly exploring the opportunities of the future. This is amply demonstrated in the Water, Agriculture and Health sectors, which form important priority areas of our cooperation. We have a robust trade and investment partnership, with bilateral trade of more than \$17 billion and two-way investments worth \$64 billion. There is an increasing presence of Indian companies in the Netherlands and we see a similar trend of Dutch companies showing great enthusiasm for doing business with India. The historical people to people ties, and the growing Indian community in the Netherlands is an important link between our countries, that will continue to form a solid foundation for our vibrant and multifaceted relations.

6. Regular exchange of high-level visits has enhanced mutual understanding and given a strong momentum to our relations. The past

year saw the historic State visit of our President to the Netherlands. He was warmly welcomed by His Majesty King Willem Alexander and Her Majesty Queen Maxima. This was followed by separate visits by the Deputy Prime Minister & Foreign Minister Mr. Wopke Hoekstra; and Her Majesty Queen Maxima to India during the year. Our Prime Ministers have remained in regular touch to discuss regional and global developments. Secretary General Paul Huijts was in India last month for the Foreign Office Consultations.

7. We are delighted that the Netherlands will be joining as a guest country during our G20 Presidency this year. This reflects the great importance we attach to our partnership. We strongly believe that the Netherlands, as the world's 17<sup>th</sup> largest economy and with tremendous experience and advanced technological capabilities in a number of critical areas, can make a valuable contribution to enrich the G20 agenda. The coming months will see several high level visits from the Netherlands to India, including Ministerial visits, and the much anticipated G20 leaders' summit in New Delhi in September. Nearly 200 technical and working level visits are planned throughout the year. We look forward to working with the Netherlands under the G20 framework, as well as on our bilateral agenda.

8. In addition to our vibrant bilateral exchanges, India and the Netherlands have been actively promoting cooperation within the India-EU framework and supporting the early implementation of the outcomes of the India-EU Leaders' Meeting. We welcome the growing convergence of views on a number of issues of global and regional significance like the need to work towards a free and open Indo-Pacific and addressing the challenges of climate change by adopting green technologies.

9. Today, India is building stronger bridges with both developing countries and advanced economies. Apart from our G20 Presidency, we are members of a growing number of groups and mechanisms like BRICS, the Commonwealth, Quad, I2U2 and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.

We are also increasingly engaging the world in regional formats, like Africa, ASEAN, Pacific Islands, Nordic nations, Caricom, CELAC, SCO and Central Asia.

10. We are glad that India could play a constructive and stabilizing role during its two year term at the United Nations Security Council as a non-permanent member, which came to a close last month. India has concluded two major trade agreements with the UAE and Australia. Currently, talks with the EU are underway. It is our hope that through these efforts, India will be able to support resilient and secure global supply chains, which can drive prosperity in the post-covid world. I am also happy to inform you that at India's initiative, 2023 has been declared as the "International Year of Millets" by the UN, in order to popularize their health and environmental benefits.

11. Friends, let me conclude by thanking each of you for your presence today and for your continued friendship & support. Special thanks to the Secretary General and all the distinguished guests. Our Embassy team looks forward to working with all of you in the New Year.

I wish you all a prosperous, healthy and fruitful 2023 and a great evening!

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