

Toast remarks in honour of the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, Manmohan Singh, on the occasion of the official dinner

Presidential Guest House, Pretoria, 2 October 2006

Your Excellency, Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of the Republic of India and Mrs Kaur,
Our Deputy President,
Your Excellencies, Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Corporate leaders of India and South Africa,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen:

We are delighted that you, Your Excellency, your wife and your delegation have honoured us with this historic visit. On behalf of the people and government of South Africa, I am privileged once more to convey a warm welcome to you and all our dear Indian friends.

Your Excellency, we are indeed very happy that your Official Visit today coincides with an important day in the calendar of the Indian nation. We are therefore privileged to share with you the celebration of the 137th birthday of that incomparable human being, Mahatma Gandhi, as well as the Dusharah Festival which is celebrated to mark the victory of God Rama over Ravana, symbolising the triumph of good over evil.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you, Your Excellency, your delegation, the people of India as well as all Hindus, here in South Africa and all over the world, the very best on this important day.

Your Excellency, although this is your very first visit to our shores, we know that throughout your life, as is the case with many Indians, you have had a very intimate relationship with the people of this country, as well as our struggle against the repugnant system of apartheid.

Indeed, our links have been forged through our common struggle against colonialism and apartheid, which were given concrete expression by our common hero, Mahatma Gandhi, as well as many South African Indians who make us proud by having unshakable roots in both South Africa and India and by being among the most patriotic of our people.

Yesterday we had the opportunity of reliving some of the great feats that have immortalised Mahatma Gandhi - a rare human being whose phenomenal courage, humility and resolute spirit straddled the Indian Ocean and became an unbreakable thread that wove our two countries together.

It is quite fitting, therefore, that we should be meeting here in South Africa today, on Mahatma Gandhi's birthday. Your Excellency, permit me also to wish you a belated Happy Birthday, which you celebrated last week.

South Africa will always honour India as one of the most consistent and principled supporters of our struggle for liberation. It was India, even as she was barely independent and free herself, that utilised every conceivable opportunity to draw international attention to the evils of oppression and racial injustice, occupying an honoured place within the world family of nations as a strong voice of morality, national liberation, social justice and human dignity.

Your Excellency, we are indeed very happy that our bilateral relations are becoming stronger every day. Although our bilateral trade has grown significantly since our freedom in 1994, I believe, Your Excellency, that the current trade figures do not reflect the full potential of existing commercial opportunities that could still considerably boost our bilateral trade.

I am pleased that we have agreed that much more needs to be done to exploit these opportunities to expand both trade between, and investment in each other's economies. We are very pleased that the India-South Africa CEO Forum was established, confident that this vital institution, which also met during the Prime Minister's visit, will make an enormous contribution to help our countries achieve our shared economic objectives.

As you are aware, Your Excellency, two of the important foundations for our bilateral relations are the historic 1997 Red Fort Declaration on Strategic Partnership between South Africa and India and the Delhi Declaration of 2003.

We are proud that this bilateral partnership is based on shared values, a strong and common commitment to shared prosperity, social justice and co-operation for a global order that is marked by peace, security and equity. As Strategic Partners, and as we should, our countries have been engaging each other on the political, economic, educational, cultural, social and defence areas, as well as through people-to-people contact.

In reflecting on our strategic partnership and our engagement, it is clear that we have made considerable progress but we need to do more, further to strengthen this partnership. This conviction motivated us to adopt the Tshwane Declaration we signed today, which commits us to develop our bilateral partnership to an even higher strategic level.

Today, the institutional relationship between our two countries is both rich and diverse, giving us the possibility significantly to increase our mutually beneficial co-operation across a broad front of activities.

To date, our two countries have signed about thirty agreements and Memoranda of Understanding.

But, Your Excellency, as we have agreed, these agreements are not an end in themselves. We have therefore agreed to do everything possible to give substance to the content of these agreements and speedily implement them to the mutual betterment of our peoples. Consistent with the idiom of Mahatma Gandhi, we reiterate today: "The difference between what we do and what we could do would suffice to solve most of the world's problems."

Your Excellency, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you most sincerely for the manner in which, during the visit to our country, you have inspired all of us to do the things we must do practically to strengthen our relations across the board.

In this regard, Your Excellency, I would like to thank you, your government and the sister people of India for engaging in practical programmes to help us address one of the biggest challenges facing our country. This is in the area of human resource development under the Indian Technical and Economic Co-operation Programme (ITEC); through the scholarship schemes offered by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and through other various bilateral mechanisms, thus contributing to skills development and capacity building in South Africa.

Your Excellency, both India and South Africa share the common understanding that global economic relations continue to be characterised by huge inequalities, with large sections of the world yet to reap the benefits of globalisation. In this context, the sad suspension of the Doha Development Round negotiations has been a severe disappointment, and we need to do all we can to overcome this grave setback, which dates back to the unfinished business of the Uruguay Round.

We are proud that together with Brazil we have formed a trilateral partnership - IBSA - and we were honoured to share your company and insights last month in Brasilia, on how to strengthen South-South relationships.

Further, Your Excellency, we are privileged to have India as an ally as we work together in multilateral fora, especially to address such important challenges as reforming the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions, and fighting international terrorism. We are encouraged that India continues to be a reliable partner in our on-going efforts for the renaissance of our continent, and in this regard value your partnership with the African Union and its programme, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please join me in a toast to the good health and prosperity of His Excellency, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Mrs Kaur, and to the long-lasting friendship, co-operation and partnership between the peoples of India and South Africa. To friendship!

Thank you.