

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE ON THE OCCASION OF INAUGURATION OF THE
KOCHI MUZIRIS BIENNALE SEMINAR ON 'IMPORTANCE OF
SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL BUILDING'**

**MARCH 2, 2017
KOCHI, KERALA**

1. I am happy to be in Kochi today at the latest edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale.

2. The Biennale, which is today known as the People's Biennale, has become an integral part of the cultural calendar of our country. It has rejuvenated Kerala's longstanding contribution to visual arts and culture, and cemented Kochi's status as a cosmopolitan city brimming with potential and ideas.

3. Contemporary art is one of the most significant ways of expressing thoughts, emotions, concerns and ideas that are current, that are relevant to us in the time we live in. The fact that Kerala, this land of history and tradition, now hosts the largest show of contemporary art in the region, and that too a show that was seeded by government, speaks to the unique ways of this state and its people.

4. Kerala has always been known for its secular approach towards art and culture. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale is a proud symbol of this approach and the sense of oneness and inclusivity that exists here.

5. The Kochi Biennale Foundation has made a wonderful innovation in attempting to use art to link the historic legacy of present-day Kochi with the rich cultural influences of its predecessor Muziris, a financial and trade centre that was believed to have been vanished in floods in 1314 A.D. The event's resounding success can be gauged from the fact that it has so far attracted more than a million visitors.

6. The collaborative nature of the partnership between the government and the Kochi Biennale Foundation, and the very successful result of that partnership, is proof of what can be achieved when a government invests in culture. Public funding for the arts provides support, offers certainty and the opportunity to touch the lives of vast numbers of people.

7. Public funds have the power to act as seed funding, giving others the confidence to invest in the creation and innovation of cultural organizations like the Kochi Biennale Foundation which, along with the Kerala government, is providing cultural stewardship and playing host to global artistic ideas on our own ground. When you partner that with innovative ideas and a unique point of view, the results can be staggering and beautiful.

8. We Need The Arts. All over the world cultural activities are easy targets for spending cuts. But if the state is to act as the catalyst then what must be its role? What institutions must be built up, and what confidence measures should be taken? The Kochi Biennale Foundation is a good case study of what is possible when differing agencies come together to pursue profound goals: to value culture, and the achievements of the human spirit, to celebrate the human imagination, and to make those achievements key markers of development. But most important this model should be replicated in different parts of the country. I hope the panelists can discuss and consider all these questions. I wish you all the very best and a meaningful discourse.

9. And with these words, I declare this seminar open for discussion. I wish all of you the very best.

Jai Hind!