

**ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE CONFERMENT OF
PROFESSOR *HONORIS CAUSA* BY THE BELARUS STATE
UNIVERSITY**

[Minsk, Belarus: 3 June, 2015]

H'ble Minister of Education of Belarus, Mr. M.A. Zhuravkov,
Rector of the Belarus State University Mr S.V. Ablameyko,
Members of the Faculty and distinguished members of the academic
community of this prestigious national University,
Distinguished guests, It is indeed a privilege to be amidst you today. I
thank the Rector, Mr S.V. Ablameyko for his generous words. I would
like to begin by reciprocating his warm sentiments and conveying my
thanks for the high honour that has been bestowed upon me today.

I am deeply touched by this gesture. I take it as a reflection of the
warmth of the people of Belarus towards my country and for me. It is,
therefore, with profound appreciation and humility that I accept the
Professor Honoris Causa conferred on me by the Belarus State
University in my capacity as the President of India on behalf of the
people of India.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Visitor of 114 Institutes of Higher Learning in India, I am particularly
pleased to visit this University which has, over the past several
decades, established itself as the premier institution of higher education
in Belarus. I am aware that the Belarus State University has contributed
significantly to the richly deserved reputation of Belarus as a country of
academic excellence in a wide range of academic streams - including
science, technology and engineering as well as medicine and human
sciences.

The intellectual caliber of the University and its alumni is reflected in the fact that it contributes as many as three out of every four researchers to the Belarus Academy of Sciences. Your pursuit of scientific knowledge and advanced research places this University at the centre of Belarus' national developmental programmes.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I am in Belarus on the first ever State Visit by an Indian President. It is thus a privilege for me to have had this opportunity of visiting you and conveying India's strong interest in further deepening our already substantive relationship with Belarus.

Relations between India and Belarus have developed quite rapidly over the past two decades. Our relationship now spans several sectors ranging from trade and economic cooperation, science, technology, education as well as defence cooperation.

We recall the successful visits to India by His Excellency the President of Belarus in 1997 and 2007, which gave a fillip to our ties. My own visit reflects India's deep interest in strengthening our partnership with Belarus. As you are aware, India is emerging as one of the largest economies in the world and one of the fastest growing emerging markets - with an average annual growth rate of more than 7 per cent over the past decade. There are positive signals that suggest that we could be moving to an even higher growth path.

I have had excellent discussions with President Lukashenko earlier today. Our talks have convinced me that we share the same enthusiasm and desire to expand our bilateral relations. With a view to further energize our co-operation, we have issued a very substantive and focused Roadmap on the India-Belarus partnership. We are hopeful that

we can double our trade to a level of US \$ 1 billion by the year 2020. India's decision to grant 'Market Economy Status' to Belarus will also be a significant step to enhance our bilateral trade and to promote greater integration of Belarus in international trade structures.

Therefore, I am confident that the outcomes and understandings reached during my discussions with the Belarusian leadership will help propel our relationship to an even higher trajectory in future.

Even as we deepen and diversify our bilateral relationship in many directions, we can also further consolidate the excellent cooperation between India and Belarus in multilateral forums over the past years. Given our similar approaches to major international issues, I am confident that India and Belarus can continue to further our respective regional and global agenda through mutual support and understanding.

Friends, India has and will always remain committed to peaceful methods in its foreign policy. However, terrorism and extremism emanating from our shared neighbourhood remains a major security threat for India and for Belarus too. Addressing this challenge requires greater cooperation among all countries and clarity of purpose.

In fact, the need for more representative and inclusive structures of global governance has never been felt as acutely as today. We cannot address the serious political, military, economic, ecological and technological challenges of the 21st Century using the international instruments conceived at a different phase in human history.

India and Belarus are committed to a greater role for developing nations in international institutions and structures. However, despite the fact that there is a wider diffusion of power in the international system and

emerging economies have grown in strength, there has been little progress in changing the methodology and processes of international decision-making.

Cooperation between India and Belarus, as well as other like-minded countries will be essential to bring about the necessary changes in a reasonable time-frame. We appreciate Belarus' support for India's permanent membership of UN Security Council and membership of the NSG.

Ours is truly a problem-free relationship, with vast potential for further development. The best guarantee for sustained growth in relations between countries is to expand the interactions between people. The fact that I am accompanied today by a Cabinet Minister and 4 Members of the Parliament of India reflects the importance that my Government attaches to fostering the trade and economic ties and strengthening the people to people relations between our two nations. Though our formal diplomatic ties have a relatively short history, cultural interactions between India and Belarus have an interesting past. India's national poet, Rabindranath Tagore, visited Minsk in 1931 and met with several leading intellectuals and fellow writers of the time. In fact, his poetry was widely admired here. The musician, Nicholas Nabokov, who was born near Minsk, travelled to India in the 1960s and was impressed by India's musical traditions. I am sure there are many other academic, intellectual and cultural connections between our two countries that lie hidden in the recesses of time. Several Belarusians have studied Indian classical dance and some of them have started offering lessons to others. Yoga is another aspect of Indian culture that is becoming increasingly popular. I am told that Indian films have been popular in Belarus: perhaps the splendid landscape of this beautiful country could, itself, provide a backdrop for shooting Indian films.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Among my engagements today, I had the privilege of installing a bust of the Father of the Indian nation, Mahatma Gandhi at this prestigious University. Gandhiji continues to inspire the people of India – and indeed the world through his profound philosophy and personal example. His message of truth and non violence is as relevant today as it was in his time - as the world confronts the challenges of violent conflict, terror and large scale displacement of populations. We are, therefore, happy to share an image of this apostle of peace with the people of Belarus and are happy that they value his legacy.

It is, indeed, heartwarming for me to see the popular goodwill for India in Belarus - which is fully reciprocated by India. I am therefore, even more convinced of the great potential of our tourism, cultural, educational and other people-to-people exchanges.

With these words, Distinguished Rector, I thank you, the Students and faculty members of this prestigious University for the honour that you have bestowed upon me today.

I would also like to convey to you all the warm greetings of the people of India.

I wish you all every success in your future endeavours.

Thank you!
