

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE STATE BANQUET HOSTED BY THE
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FINLAND, H.E. MR. SAULI
NIINISTO**

Helsinki, Finland: 15-10-2014

Your Excellency, Mr. Sauli Niinisto, President of Finland,
I am grateful for your gracious words. It is indeed a pleasure and a great honour for me to be here amidst this distinguished gathering in the Land of the Midnight Sun. I bring to the Government and the friendly people of Finland, warm greetings and good wishes of the Government and the people of the Republic of India.

Excellency, at the very outset I would like to thank you for the warm welcome and hospitality accorded to me and to my delegation. We are delighted to be in Finland.

Excellency, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
We, in India, know Finland for the beauty of the Laplands and the industrious nature of its citizens. We see Finland as an advanced society that has smoothly and successfully developed into an efficiently functioning welfare State. We appreciate the Finnish value system that puts a premium on education and high productivity, encourages the spirit of enquiry and innovation and gives women equality in the true sense of the word. India attaches great value to its friendship and co-operation with Finland.

The Government and the people of India and Finland have, over the years, developed a close and fruitful relationship of friendship and co-operation. We share a unique bond of reciprocated trust - based on our shared values and synergies. Though we may be separated by geographical distances, our co-operation has, in recent years, become increasingly multifaceted, dynamic and significantly rewarding.

Mr. President, our bilateral economic and commercial relations have grown in recent years. In 2013, our bilateral trade crossed the one billion dollar mark. However, given the relative size of our economies and the wide convergence of interests in many areas, the present level of trade and investment needs to be substantially enhanced which I have no doubt, it will. We are grateful to Finland for standing by India on certain issues that we consider to be important and urgent. Finland has been steadfast in its support of India's consistent and principled stand on the issue of terrorism. We are grateful for your support for India's rightful claim to Permanent Membership of the United Nations Security Council.

India appreciates Finland's strong economy and sophisticated technological capabilities. Finland has made tremendous advancements in infrastructure development, communications and information technology, clean energy, shipbuilding, manufacturing, biotechnology, healthcare and services. We would very much like to enhance our bilateral co-operation in these areas, learn from the

successful experience and practices of Finland and join Finland in creating new and innovative products and technology. I am confident that the agreements that we have signed will open new avenues and many new opportunities for our people to work together for mutual benefit. India invites investors and entrepreneurs from Finland to look at India's infrastructure sector and to join Indian counterparts in the "Make in India" initiative of the new Government. We look forward to new partnerships and collaborations in areas of common interest.

Excellency in this age of global competitiveness, Finland's advantage in world class innovation is a key distinguishing factor. The systems that you have put in place to linking research and innovation to industry is amongst the best in the world. This has helped Finland to develop advanced technology for its own industrial sector as well as for export. In your Parliamentary Committee for the Future, you have created a unique institutional capacity for guiding Government policy. There is much that India can learn from Finland.

Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In India, we remember Finland for the Helsinki Summer Olympics of 1952, where India won a Gold medal in Hockey, our national game, and a bronze medal in Wrestling.

We also recall that our great philosopher and poet, Guru Rabindranath Tagore, referred to Finland in one of his poems titled 'Apaghat' (Bombshell) written during the Second World War. I am pleased that Gurudev Tagore's work has been translated into the Finnish language and has been widely appreciated in Finland. We welcome the interest of the Finnish people in our culture and heritage. We invite them to visit India. Finland is one of the countries to whose citizens we are extending the visa on arrival facility. I have no doubt that in the days and years to come, such linkages will form the bedrock of an ever stronger friendship between our peoples.

With these words, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I request you to join me in raising a toast:

·to the health and happiness of His Excellency, Mr. Sauli Niinisto, President of the Republic of Finland and Mrs. Jenni Haukio;

·to the continued success, progress, prosperity and well-being of the people of India and Finland; and

·to the friendship and enduring cooperation between India and the friendly Republic of Finland.

Thank you.