



Speech
by
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at Gala Dinner in honour
the President of India
Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam
Reykjavik
30 May 2005

Distinguished President Dr. Abdul Kalam
Your Excellencies
Dear Indian friends
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with a warm heart and high hopes that we welcome you here today and celebrate your historic journey, the first State Visit by a President of India to Iceland.

We are profoundly honoured by your friendship and privileged to share in your vision, a vision of human progress, discoveries and scientific advance, a vision of increased prosperity and welfare, a vision of democracy and mutual understanding.

India and Iceland are well placed to demonstrate the potential of this vision in our global times. Despite the geographical distance between us we have been influenced by similar experiences.

We both suffered under foreign rule, were hampered by poverty and the dominance of colonial masters.

We both engaged in a prolonged fight for independence although yours saw thousands die when we were fortunate to gain success entirely through dialogue and democratic means. Our republics were founded at similar times, the new sovereignty became the foundation of our progress.

We have both put great faith in our people, building success on the brainpower of the young, greeting the new century with optimism and determination, seeing our educated young generation increasingly establishing global leadership on so many different fronts.

Distinguished President Dr. Abdul Kalam.

Your own contribution to the progress of India has indeed been outstanding, based on scientific brilliance and a great respect for the power of human knowledge, but also inspired by the humility and humbleness which are such an admirable aspect of the Indian tradition.

In our discussions in Delhi only a few months ago your hopes for this visit reflected your background and we agreed that your programme would emphasise science and technical knowledge as the foundation of our growing friendship, and thus declare that such discoveries provide our cooperation with great potential.

Your State Visit is indeed the first of its kind to our country to emphasise so strongly the importance of scientific research and technologically based progress. In precisely these terms we signal the essence of our future success.

The people of Iceland are proud to show you how in this way we can strengthen our cooperation.

The early warning system for earthquakes and other geo-hazards which we demonstrated to you earlier today has become the leading program of its kind in the entire world and the potential of information technology to create a comprehensive response was also elaborately explained.

Tomorrow you will witness our advanced geothermal technology and how environmentally sound energy and hydrogen-driven traffic systems can help the world to reduce the threat of climate change.

Our cooperation in the field of pharmaceuticals and science-based healthcare has also been a fundamental part of your visit, encouraging researchers and entrepreneurs in India and Iceland to enhance their joint efforts to better the lives of the suffering millions, to create a successful network reaching across Asia and Europe, America and other parts of the world. The declaration which was made in our presence about joint Indian-Icelandic production of a new drug to fight the growing epidemic of Aids, the most threatening health hazard of our times, is a strong signal of what we can together achieve.

For us in Iceland the emergence of the new India is indeed a welcome prospect, especially for those of us who have for a long time been privileged to be friends of India, to be enriched by witnessing the colourful display of the human spirit, of contrasts and creativity which one can enjoy on every corner in your great country, in villages in Rajasthan as well as in high-tech quarters in Bangalore or Pune.

I am personally deeply grateful for all that India has taught me, for the lessons and the friendship I have enjoyed.

On my most recent visit, only a few months ago, I was privileged after our discussions in Delhi and the wonderful walk around your garden, to visit a number of cities in different parts of the country. What I saw was indeed the arrival of the new India, India growing in strength and certainly advancing, standing at the very forefront of human knowledge, building successful enterprises in partnership with others – the new India which in a decade or so will together with China and the United States be the largest economy in the entire world.

But above all I witnessed once again the democratic India, the India of free speech and open intellectual encounters, the India of different and competing political parties, the India which values above all the right of each and every citizen to be heard, to influence the decision-making process, to throw out the government if the opposition offers a better deal – India providing the splendid proof that people of all races and all religions can thrive and prosper together, celebrating the opportunities of an open and free society.

The joint challenge which India and Iceland face in the future is to bear witness to this democratic vision – India the largest democracy on earth; Iceland the oldest democracy in the world.

The new global times make this our most important mission, the core of our cooperation.

Your visit now is a strong manifestation of our determination to succeed, to strengthen the bonds which bring us together. In the spirit of the free thought which inspires our joint democratic heritage we welcome you tonight to the heart of the Reykjavik Arts Festival among the works of two distinguished artists, Dieter Roth and Erró, who have both treated Iceland as a home but seen the world as their challenge. That quality in their vision provides the young generation of our countries, a generation of entrepreneurs and scientists, with guidance on their future path.

The people of Iceland offer you, distinguished President Dr. Abdul Kalam, and your entire delegation a warm welcome and we feel deeply encouraged by the promises which your journey offers.

In celebration of your State Visit I ask all our distinguished guests to rise and honour the President of India and to salute the splendid prospects of our cooperation and friendship.