



Toespraak

van de Voorzitter van de Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, prof.dr. J.A. Bruijn,
ter gelegenheid van de viering van de 71e Republiek Dag van India

datum 27 januari 2020

माननीय राजदूत (maananeey raajadoot)

Honourable Ambassador,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Namasté,

It is a great honour for me to be invited to speak on the occasion of the 71st Republic Day of India, also known as Purna Swaraj.

On this day India celebrates that on January 26, 1950, the Constitution of India came into effect. This year exactly seventy years ago.

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, who drafted the constitution in 1948, wrote – and I quote – “Constitution is not a mere lawyers document. It is a vehicle of life, and its spirit is always the spirit of age.” Unquote. And how the spirit of India’s Constitution has come of age indeed!

Today, India is the largest democracy in the world. It is impressive how your country, Mr Ambassador, has been able to establish rule – ‘raj’ in Hindi – of law in India.

I already referred to Purna Swaraj. On January 26 1930, exactly twenty years before the Constitution came into effect, Independence Day was proclaimed by the Indian National Congress to commemorate those who campaigned for Indian independence.



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'Purna' meaning 'complete', 'swa' meaning 'self' and 'raj' meaning 'rule'. Purna Swaraj: Complete Self Rule.

In the months following a movement towards full independence from the British Government was formed. This eventually led to the transfer of power to India by the British government seventeen years later, on August 15, 1947. Today the values of democracy, pluralism and rule of law are still at the core of India's society. Values we share together, the Republic of India and the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Last year our King Willem-Alexander and Queen Máxima visited your country. In one of the King's speeches he quoted the very first treaty between India and the Netherlands, over 400 years ago: "Eternal friendship, as long as the sun and moon are in the sky."

The book you wrote last year, Mr Ambassador, 'India and the Netherlands – Past, Present and Future', is a testimony of that eternal friendship. You have illustrated in an impressive and extensive manner how India and the Netherlands have had - and still have - close relations on many levels, from the days of the Dutch East India Company to today with Tata Consultancy Services, the first Indian IT services company to open its doors in the Netherlands. And it did not end there and then!

According to data provided by the Central Bureau of Statistics in the Netherlands the number of Indian migrants to the Netherlands has doubled between 2012 and 2017. Among them students, entrepreneurs and IT-professionals. Most work in Information Technology and Information Services. No wonder, since India has become a global player in the field of information and technology.



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For instance in my field of expertise – I am a doctor by profession - : many of the solutions for healthcare and medical innovations come from India. And there is also a growing interest in more traditional medicine and wellness systems from India, such as yoga. On International Yoga day 2019 Dam Square in Amsterdam filled with yoga enthusiasts from all over the Netherlands, even from the Royal Netherlands Army!

Not just economically, also politically and culturally the exchanges between our countries are extensive and solid. Apart from our King and Queen last October, our governments have over the past decades shared experiences during visits both here and there. Also Indian and Dutch cultural exchanges are proof of the strong relationship between our countries. As Prime Minister Nehru said during his official visit to the Netherlands in 1957: "All of us live on each other's doorstep."

Honourable Ambassador,

Before I conclude, one more remark on the Indian Constitution - the reason we are here today: the day it was signed it was drizzling outside. It was interpreted as a sign of good omen. Something the Dutch can learn from!

I congratulate the Republic of India and all Indians on this Republic Day. In the Netherlands we cherish the excellent bond between our two countries. We do hope and trust that this bond will remain as 'long as the sun and moon are in the sky'.



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It is an honour to celebrate this important day with you.

बधाई हो (badhaee ho)

Congratulations.