

Welcome address by Shri Harsh K Jain, Ambassador of India, Astana at reception to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of ITEC and mark ICCR Day, March 10, 2015.

Your Excellency Mr. Askar Mussinov, Deputy Foreign Minister and Chief Guest of today's function, distinguished Alumni of ITEC and ICCR and dear friends, Good evening.

I am delighted to welcome you all today to celebrate the golden jubilee of India's Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme, ITEC in short, and to mark the ICCR Day.

Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme was instituted in September 1964. It is a visible symbol of India's role and contribution to South-South cooperation and is a fundamental pillar of India's foreign policy. Although it was formally established in 1964, Indian development cooperation had begun a decade earlier. We made a modest beginning by offering 75 scholarships to friendly countries in the early 50s. From that stage, we have come a long way. India today offers over 10,000 scholarships covering 47 training institutions. Over 140 countries and ten multilateral organisations are India's ITEC partners. As part of programme, India provides not only technical know-how and capacity building in civilian & defence spheres, but also project related activities like consultancy services, feasibility studies, deputation of Indian experts abroad, study tours, humanitarian aid and disaster relief.

Kazakhstan has been India's ITEC partner since 1992. Many luminous Kazakh nationals including the current Ambassadors of Kazakhstan to the United Kingdom and Mongolia had attended Professional Course for Foreign Diplomats in India way back in 1992. I studied at the same institute two years later. Since then, nearly 1000 scholars from Kazakhstan comprising over 850 participants from the civilian side and about 120 from the defence side have availed the programme. The programme covers a wide range of subjects in different sectors including information technology, English proficiency, financial management, parliamentary studies, agricultural practices, remote sensing, environmental technology, web designing and so on. In the defence sector, courses include higher strategic management, pre-commissioning officer training, training in the field of Counter Terrorism, Special Forces, Mountain and Winter Warfare as also English language proficiency in a number of premier defence institutions.

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), was founded in 1950 by Shri Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, India's first Education Minister, to foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries. It forms an important component of India's cultural diplomacy. In addition to organising cultural exchanges, ICCR extends scholarships to foreign students in various streams of humanities at the under-graduate, post-graduate and doctoral programmes, and performing arts like Indian dance, music, painting etc. in premier Indian institutions and universities. More than 3300 scholarships are offered annually. Over 200 scholars from Kazakhstan have availed ICCR scholarships in the last 15 years.

ICCR has 35 Indian Cultural Centres in different parts of the world including one in Kazakhstan. The Indian Cultural Center in Kazakhstan was initially set up in 1994 in Almaty but later shifted to Astana. Since its inception- the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) has been engaged in multifaceted cultural activities and has become a major vehicle of cultural exchange between the two countries.

Besides other activities, the Centre conducts daily Yoga classes, which are very popular. Yoga is an invaluable gift of India's ancient tradition. It embodies unity of mind and body and brings about harmony between man and nature. I am glad to tell you that following an initiative taken by India's Prime Minister, June 21 has been declared as the "International Day of Yoga" by the United Nations. We will be celebrating the first "International Yoga Day" on June 21 this year. We have arranged a short yoga demonstration in the cultural component of today's programme.

One of the distinguished alumna of ICCR is Ms. Akmaral Kainazarova, who is now running her own Centre of Classical Indian Dance in Almaty with a modest support from the Embassy. She is here with us today and would later share her experience and also present a dance sequence.

Today's function is about the celebration of the friendships that we have built through sharing of our knowledge, culture and experience under the ITEC and ICCR programmes. It provides us an opportunity to re-connect with ITEC and ICCR alumni. We have several esteemed alumni of ITEC and ICCR present here today. We would request some of them to share their experiences. Here I may mention that we have with us today Ms Laura Yerekesheva, UNESCO Chair Coordinator and Deputy Director, Institute of Oriental Studies in Almaty who has the unique distinction of being an ITEC as well as an ICCR Alumna. I thank her as well as Ms. Senimgul Dossova, Head of Department of Indology, Al-Farabi University, and Ms. Akmaral Kainazarova for coming all the way from Almaty to join us in today's celebration.

We will also screen a short 8 minute film on the ITEC programme to see what other people have to say about the programme. And lastly but not the least, the hotel chef has worked out a special menu of Indian cuisine to remind you of your days in India.

Let me conclude by wishing all the very best to you and other ITEC and ICCR alumni, who could not join us today. I am confident that the ITEC and ICCR programmes would continue to enlarge this circle of friends, promote better understanding among different people of the world, and contribute to global peace and prosperity. I thank you all for joining us today. I hope you would enjoy the evening. I specially thank the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs H. E. Mr. Askar Mussinov for sparing his valuable time in joining us today and request him to come to the podium and share his thoughts.

Thank you.