

Ambassador's Speech - Pravasi Bhartiya Divas 2016
(Jan 16, Almaty)

Dear friends, it gives me an immense pleasure to welcome you all to the first Pravasi Bhartiya Divas being celebrated in Kazakhstan.

As you are aware, since 2003, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is celebrated in India every year on 9th January to connect India to its vast overseas diaspora. It was on 9th January in 1915 that Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest Pravasi, returned to India from South Africa.

The Indian Diaspora is no doubt a great asset and source of strength to our country. During the past 13 years, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas has been celebrated like a festival recognizing and commemorating the achievements of the Indian diaspora. It has proved to be useful in networking with Overseas Indian Community, understanding their issues and co-opting them in India's development.

Last year was the 100th anniversary of the return of Mahatma Gandhi to India. Therefore, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas was celebrated in a manner with great pomp and show. It was also decided to change the format of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. Although the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas will continue to be organized every year, henceforth the main event will be held every two years.

Accordingly, this year the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas was organized in a unique way. It was celebrated across the world through our Missions and Posts. The External Affairs Minister Smt. Sushma Swaraj addressed overseas Indian through webcast and interacted with them through video conferencing. In a short while, we will listen to her address. In her address, she also explains the rationale behind the new format.

The new format allows a more structured dialogue with the Indian Diaspora on various issues of mutual interest and come up with the recommendations that can be implemented.

This year ten such issues have been selected. As explained by Mr. Gururaj, we will have discussion on eight of these issues spread over four sessions. We have removed two issues that don't appear to be of interest in Kazakhstan. These are (i) issues relating to Diaspora in countries where large number of Indian were sent as indentured labour and (ii) managing emigration to ECR countries and role of Indian Council of Migration.

The Indian Diaspora, spread around the world, has contributed to India in many ways. This includes direct contributions in terms of investments and remittances, bringing back knowledge and expertise and indirect contributions by being Ambassadors of Indian ethos of peace, respect for plurality, culture and values. In many countries, members of Indian Diaspora are in influential position and have contributed in developing closer bilateral relations with those countries.

Although much younger and smaller in number, I am glad that Indian Diaspora in Kazakhstan has earned a good name and respect for it. I commend all your efforts in promoting India's trade and business interests and culture in the country.

The visit of our Prime Minister to Kazakhstan last year has provided fresh impetus to bilateral relations. I urge you to build on this momentum by exploring new opportunities to expand your activities.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is dedicated to you, your contributions and achievements. I heartily congratulate you all on this occasion. I should admit that given small numbers of Indian Diaspora, we were skeptical in the beginning whether there will be sufficient interest to participate in this event. I am glad that the skepticism has been proven wrong. Next year, we will begin planning well in advance and would like to hold the event either on January 9 itself or a date closer to it.

I am looking forward to listening to your valuable ideas and suggestions on the issues on the agenda for discussion today.

Thank you.