

Speech by Ambassador on the occasion of commemoration of 155th Birth Anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore at Ust-Kamenogorsk on 16 May, 2016

Your Excellency Deputy Mayor of East Kazakhstan Region Mr. Omar Zhaksylyk Mukashevich, Director of the Museum Mr. Nikolai Alexeevich Zaitsev, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be present amidst you in this beautiful and historic city of Ust-Kamenogorsk today. I bring with me the warm greetings and best wishes of over one billion people of India to all the people and guests of Ust-Kamenogorsk.

I am glad that my first visit to this city coincides with the celebration of the 155th Birth Anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, a great man, who inspired not only his fellow countrymen and women but numerous people worldwide.

Rabindranath Tagore was a multifaceted genius, a highly talented personality, an eminent poet and writer, visual artist, musician and a philosopher but above all a humanist.

He advocated freedom for all humanity. His ideas on universal humanism are timeless in their appeal and would always continue to resonate. His belief in unity of all peoples is a powerful message for a world beset with greed, forces of extremism and intolerance.

Gurudev's works were inspired by his quest for inner truth and a sense of solidarity that transcends borders and breaks down barriers of religion, race or language.

He said “Civilization must be judged and prized, not by the amount of power it has developed, but by how much it has evolved and given expression to, by its laws and institutions, the love of humanity.”

He did not leave any human emotion untouched in his works, be it nature, love, separation, celebration, devotion, patriotism or simple imagination; he gave a song for every occasion. His poetic endeavor, Gitanjali, won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. He became the first Asian to receive this prestigious award.

He also has a unique distinction of being the composer of the national anthems of three countries. His composition Jana Gana Mana ' is national anthem of India and Amar Shonar Bangla ' is national anthem of Bangladesh. The Sinhalese translation of a song written by him in Bengali is the national anthem of Sri Lanka.

His desire to reach out to a larger humanity; his concern over war and conflict, his inner need to condemn the destructive nature of territorial and militant nationalism, his deep-rooted conviction in the spiritual and cultural convergence, made him to travel extensively between the years 1916 to 1934, including to the former Soviet Union.

The first Russian language translation of Tagore's poem Gitanjali was made in 1917 by

Ivan Bunin who himself later became the first Russian Noble Laureate in literature. But the credit for translating the works of Tagore into Kazakh language goes to gifted writer and poet Aubakir Nilibayev, who was awarded Padma Shri by Government of India in 2004.

I profoundly thank the Museum and the Regional administration of East Kazakhstan Region for installing the bust of Rabindranath Tagore in the main central park of Ust Kamenogorsk in 2009.

The statue of Tagore in the land of Abay is a symbol of and tribute to the abiding friendship between the people of Kazakhstan and people of India.

This brings me to the deep-rooted, historical and cultural linkages between India and Kazakhstan. We find evidence of these linkages in archeological findings of trade between South and Central Asia and mention of the Saka tribes in Indian epic Mahabharata.

A branch of Saka tribes later travelled and assimilated in India. The flow of trade and exchange of ideas intensified with the emergence of the Great Silk Route. Buddhism travelled from India to Central Asia and Sufism travelled from here to India. The ruins of Ablakyt Buddhist monastery near Ust-Kamenogorsk and seven-chambered Buddhist temple in today's Semey, are evidence of these exchanges.

Babur and Mukhammed Haidar, are as well known in Kazakhstan as they are in India. The Mughal dynasty founded by Babur immensely contributed to the further evolution of Indian culture, art and architecture, and gave the heritage of Taj Mahal to the people of world.

More recently, over last hundred years, we have seen the flow of the cultural influences from India through the popularity of Indian films, TV serials, culture, dance, music and yoga in Kazakhstan.

At political level, India was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Kazakhstan in 1991 and establish diplomatic relations in 1992. Our relations have steadily grown since then. Today, Kazakhstan is India's largest trade and investment partner in Central Asia. The visit by our Prime Minister to Kazakhstan in July 2015 has further strengthened these relations and expanded strategic cooperation between the two countries.

The first Ambassador of India to Kazakhstan visited Ust Kamenogorsk in September 1994. Over the last 22 years, the Embassy of India has been closely working with the East

Kazakhstan region and the Regional Architectural Ethnographic and Landscape Reserve Museum.

Over 300 Indian students are currently studying at the Semey State Medical University. We signed an MoU on Youth Exchange Programme between the National Cadet Corps of India and the East Kazakhstan Technical University, Ust-Kamnogorsk last year. A business delegation led by the First deputy Akim Nurymbet Saktanganov visited India in February this year and had fruitful meetings with Indian businessmen.

I am confident that my present visit to Ust-Kamenogorsk would further strengthen the bonds of friendship between the people of India and the people of East Kazakhstan region.

I wholeheartedly thank Mr. Nikolai Alexeevich Zaitsev for taking this initiative to commemorate the 155th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore and invite me to participate in the celebration.

I also thank the museum for organizing the essay competition about the life and works of Rabindranath Tagore. The high quality of the essays demonstrates the cross-cultural awareness and exceptional talent of the participants. I thank all who participated in the competition and heartily congratulate the winners.

I thank the Museum, the regional administration of East Kazakhstan region and the people of Ust-Kamnogorsk for the warm welcome and hospitality being extended to me and my delegation. I wish you all good health and long life filled with joy and happiness, love and peace, prosperity and success.

Thank You.