

Speech at Prize Distribution Ceremony of Children's Painting Competition "Bright Colours of India"

Kurmetti konaktar, kadirli dostar.

I bring with me the warm greetings and good wishes of the 1.28 billion people of India to the people of Aktobe. I am extremely delighted to be here on my first visit to this beautiful city. I came to Kazakhstan over a year ago and have enjoyed every moment of my stay in this wonderful country with even more wonderful people.

Few months ago, when Dr. Laura Yerekesheva mentioned to me about her idea to organize a children's painting competition on India, I wondered how much children in Kazakhstan would know about India, but few months later when I saw their work, I was amazed to see the India of their imagination rolled out on the paintings.

No doubt, there is an incontrovertible link between India and this region. It is the land with which India has deep-rooted historical and cultural linkages from ancient times to the present. The Saka tribes from Kazakhstan are believed to have participated in the great legendary war described in the Indian epic Mahabharata and later traveled and assimilated in India. You may be surprised to know that Saka calendar is still in popular use in India.

There has been a constant and regular flow of trade in goods and exchange of ideas between India and Central Asia through the southern spur of the Great Silk Route. Buddhism travelled from India to Kazakhstan and Sufism travelled from here to India. The rule by Babur's illustrious Mughal dynasty, which had roots in Central Asia, over parts of India, contributed to the further evolution of Indian culture, art and architecture.

The visit of the first Prime Minister of India Jawahar Lal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi to Kazakhstan in 1955 made a deep imprint in the minds of the people of Kazakhstan. Many girls born in Kazakhstan following this visit were named Indira, which has become a popular name in Kazakhstan today.

More recently, we have seen the rising popularity of Indian tea, Yoga, Indian films, TV serials, and dance and music in Kazakhstan. The Indian film stars Raj Kapur and Mithun Chakraborty, as well as TV serials, Madhubala and Kelin are as popular in Kazakhstan as they are in India.

It is therefore not surprising that President Nazarbayev chose to visit India as the first country outside CIS after independence of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is fortunate to have the visionary leadership of President Nazarbayev, which ushered an era of peace and stability and rapid socio-economic progress in the country. This also contributed to

the steady growth of our bilateral relations. One of the first major foreign investment in Kazakhstan came from prominent Indian businessman Mr. Laksmi Mittal.

Today, Kazakhstan is India's largest trade and investment partner in Central Asia. The recent visit by our Prime Minister to Kazakhstan has further strengthened these relations and opened new areas of cooperation. I am confident that these relations will continue to flourish and grow stronger with each passing year.

I am happy to note that there have been regular cultural exchanges with Aktobe in the recent past. A 22-member troupe from Aktobe visited India to participate in the Surajkund International Crafts Festival in February this year. Their performance in India was greatly admired. Ms. Akmaral Kainazarova and her students from the Centre of Indian Classical Dance at Almaty gave a dance performance during Nauroz festival in Aktobe in March this year. We would like to further strengthen this cooperation by having more regular cultural exchanges.

I thank Dr. Laura Yerekeshva and Ms. Saule Kurmanbayeva, Director, Children's Palace of Aktobe for organizing the painting competition "Bright Colours of India" with full support of the Embassy. The paintings demonstrate the cross-cultural awareness, creative imagination and the high talent of the Children of Aktobe. I thank all the Children who participated in the competition and heartily congratulate the winners. I wish them all the success in their lives.

I am glad to inform you that the instructors of Yoga, Kathak dance and music at the Indian Cultural center in Astana have accompanied me to Aktobe.

Yoga is an ancient Indian practice and way of life. It combines elements of physical training through various body postures, breathing control and meditation to bring about unity of mind and body that enables a person to lead a healthier life and removes obstacles that block our path from realizing the unshakable presence of peace, awareness and joy within. Dr. Brijesh Gupta, Yoga instructor would demonstrate some of the Yoga postures. Ms. Chandrani Ojah would be performing a Kathak dance sequence. Kathak is one of the eight forms of Indian classical dance that originated about 2500 years ago. The word Kathak means a storyteller. Mr. Bhaskar Ojah will give a flute recital. I hope you would enjoy the performances.

I would like to conclude by thanking Akim of Aktobe Oblast for gracing the occasion by his esteemed presence and his warm words of welcome and the House of Assembly of People of Kazakhstan for hosting this event. I also thank the children who are going to perform today and Ms. Saule Kurmanbayeva for putting up the cultural performance.

Rakhmet.