

**Speech of H.E. Mr. Ajaneesh Kumar,
High Commissioner of India to Brunei Darussalam
on the occasion of Reception
on 72nd Republic Day of India on 26 [January, 2021](#)**

**Yang Berhormat Pehin Datu Lailaraja Major General (Retired) Dato Paduka Seri
Haji Awang Halbi bin Haji Mohd Yussof,
Yang Mulia Datin Hajah Kalshom binti Haji Suhaili**

**Yang Mulia Pengiran-Pengiran,
Yang Dimuliakan Pehin-Pehin,
Yang Mulia Dato-dato and Datin-datin,
Hon'ble members of the Legislative Council,
Excellencies Heads of Diplomatic Missions ,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Ladies and Gentlemen**

Thank you for joining us this evening for the celebration of India's 72nd Republic Day. On behalf of the High Commission of India in Brunei Darussalam, I wish to extend a very warm welcome to all our distinguished guests. I also extend my heartfelt congratulations to all my compatriots, Overseas Citizens of India and Friends of India in Negara Brunei Darussalam on this joyful occasion.

There are three national days in India, Independence Day (15th August), Gandhi Jayanti (2nd October) and Republic Day (26th January). The last one, which we are celebrating this evening is a historic day for India. On this date in 1929, the Indian National Congress had made the well known 'Declaration of Indian Independence' as opposed to the British Rule. The Constitution was adopted by the Constituent Assembly of India on [26 November 1949](#) and it came into effect on [26 January 1950](#) declaring India a Sovereign, Democratic Republic. Dr. Rajendra Prasad became the first President of India.

Distinguished Guests,

2020 was a stressful year for the whole world as a consequence of the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. It shattered the global economy, expected to contract by about 4.3% in 2020-21, pushing several countries into technical recession; posed an unprecedented

challenge to our scientific community and instilled a deep sense of fear in each and every human-being.

Amidst these gloomy times the ray of hope is the potential vaccine against the virulent virus. The vaccine has already been introduced in several countries including India and, hopefully, others will receive it soon. But, as the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India has been highlighting, the fight against the deadly virus is not yet over and all of us need to remain careful and continue to follow the requisite health safety protocols and guidelines.

At the same time, I must thankfully appreciate the prompt and decisive measures taken by His Majesty the Sultan and Yag Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darusalam and strictly enforced by his Administration, for timely and effective containment of the spread of the Corona virus in the country. These steps have been extolled by one and all. In fact, this evening's function is a testament of the effectiveness of those decisive and prompt actions initiated by His Majesty and his government.

Yang Berhormat, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

India too has been seriously affected by the outbreak. India acted swiftly following the detection of the first case in the country on 30th [January 2020](#) and initiated various measures, including a stringent lock-down from 24th March.

As you all may be aware, India, the largest producer of vaccines in the world, is also playing a pivotal role in the development and manufacturing of vaccine against Covid-19. On 16 January of this year, India kickstarted its inoculation drive against Covid-19 with 2 of the 6 vaccines being developed in the country: the indigenously developed Covaxin, and the Oxford University-AstraZeneca developed Covishield, manufactured in India by the Pune-based Serum Institute of India. In the first phase of the world's largest vaccination programme, priority vaccination is being given to corona warriors and frontline workers. 30 million individuals will be covered in this Phase of the vaccination programme with the government bearing the expenses. The Phase 2 will see those with co-morbidities getting the Covid shot. The aim is to vaccinate 300 million people in the next few months, with citizens above 50 years of age and anyone under 50 with serious underlying health conditions getting priority.

No country can afford to shut down its economic activities indefinitely. After about ten weeks of lockdown, India started re-opening of the economy from 8th June 2020 in a phased manner.

The government announced various economic stimulus packages and sectoral incentives to prop up the economy. One such policy measure is the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative' or 'Self-reliant India' drive to mitigate the effects of the lockdown and strengthen the disrupted supply chains. The Atmanirbhar Bharat package, rolled out in several tranches to mitigate the biggest crisis since 1979, centres around creating an ecosystem that aids domestic demand, incentivises companies to generate jobs and boost production, and simultaneously extends benefits to those in severe distress, be it firms or individuals.

Indicators like rising production of finished steel, greater petrol and diesel consumption, increase in freight traffic, growing sales in automobile industry and higher goods and services tax revenue collections indicate that the economy is steadily bouncing back since 'the unlock'.

FDI too has shown an increasing trend in India. Gross FDI inflows in the past 20 years (April 2000 to June 2020) were US\$ 693 billion, while total FDI inflows in the last five years (April 2014 to September 2019) were US\$ 319 billion. This is approximately 50 percent of the total FDI inflow in the previous 20 years. During the current FY, for the first five months of the financial year, total FDI inflow was around US\$ 36 billion, which is the highest ever and 13% more as compared to the previous one.

Economic growth which experienced a steep fall of about 24% in April-June quarter as a result of the Covid-induced disruptions had a better result in the July-September quarter with a much lesser degree of contraction of about 12.4%, which indicates that the economy has started to gain in momentum. According to the IMF and other international agencies, India's economy is expected to grow by over 8% in 2021.

Distinguished Guests,

In order to facilitate movement of stranded Indian nationals, the government undertook a massive evacuation plan through the Vande Bharat Mission (VBM) flights. As of 24 January over 1.2 million Indians have returned home using 7490 VBM flights and over 812,838 of those stranded in India have travelled back to their adopted countries using 7491 outbound flights.

As far as Brunei is concerned, so far the High Commission has organised 9 chartered flights operated by Royal Brunei airline starting from 3rd July 2020 for repatriation of 1246 stranded Indian nationals as well as bringing back 244 people to Brunei.

Yang Berhormat, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to give you a brief overview of our bilateral relations which continue to be warm and friendly.

May 2021 will mark the 31st anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Brunei. The multifaceted relations between the two countries have witnessed a steady growth during these years, characterized by goodwill, mutual respect and understanding.

Even during these difficult times of the Covid-19 pandemic, the two countries have endeavoured to maintain the momentum in the bilateral relationship through continued progress in the areas identified during the bilateral Foreign Office Consultations, the 7th round of which was held in June 2019, and the First Joint Trade Committee Meeting, held in September 2018. These two important engagements have laid down the roadmap for further strengthening and diversification of our relationship by opening new platforms for bilateral cooperation. Efforts are on to utilise online platforms to continue this engagement.

Brunei is an important country for India's energy security through its export of crude oil to India. In fact, crude oil represents over 90% of Brunei's exports to India. India's exports to Brunei include automotive, machinery, frozen bovine meat, food items, etc. The two countries have identified quite a few areas for cooperation including agriculture, education, ICT, science & technology and health care. Both countries are also exploring bilateral cooperation in digitization, e-commerce and e-governance.

As part of India's commitment to support Brunei's capacity building programme, India has been offering various training programmes for the benefit of Bruneians. From October 2019 onwards, Bruneian officials have participated in various training programmes including in Nanosatellite Assembly & Training, cyber security and housing, an e-ITEC training module. In addition, in order to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the field of Education, India is also offering 1,000 fellowships to scholars from Brunei and other ASEAN member countries for integrated Ph.D programmes at the globally renowned 23 Indian Institutes of Technology colleges in India. Another

upcoming event is ASEAN-India online Hackathon, scheduled on 1-3 February 2021 which will provide a good opportunity to younger people from ASEAN member countries to share and exchange views and gain knowledge through interaction in the field of education, science & technology and familiarize themselves with each other's cultures, values and work ethics. From Brunei, 6 students from UTB and 2 mentors will be participating in the Hackathon.

I am confident that during the course of the current year and ahead, the friendship between the people of the two countries and the existing bilateral relations between two governments will continue to flourish and achieve newer heights.

Distinguished guests,

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate Brunei on assuming the ASEAN Chairmanship for 2021. India's relations with ASEAN has emerged as a key cornerstone of the Indian foreign policy. Starting from 1992 when India became a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN, India's relations with ASEAN has intensified and expanded manifold. From this perspective, there will be many opportunities during the course of this year for increased interaction both at political and official levels, including Summit meetings to further consolidate this relationship.

Ladies and Gentlemen, my speech will be incomplete if I do not make a mention about the Indian Community in Brunei. The 10,000-strong Indian diaspora in Brunei has been actively contributing to Brunei's economic development specially in the areas of healthcare, oil and gas sector, education, retail and construction industry. The Indian Associations in Brunei are playing an important role in developing people-to-people contacts and promoting Indian culture in Brunei. Three days back, we saw a fine example of this constructive engagement leading to the successful staging of a pan-India cultural extravaganza, "Utsav....the Celebration". I take this opportunity to urge every member of the Indian diaspora in Brunei to continue to work with dedication for further strengthening of social, cultural and economic linkages between our two countries.

In this eventful and joyous occasion, I would like to take the opportunity to express our endless gratitude and appreciation to Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Paduka Seri Baginda Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Muizzaddin Waddaulah Ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddin Saadul Khairi Waddien, Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Negara Brunei Darussalam for His Majesty's unwavering support and insightful guidance to the strengthening of the bilateral relationship between Negara Brunei

Darussalam and India. I also wish their Majesties and all members of the royal family and the people of Negara Brunei Darussalam, continued good health, harmony, success and prosperity

I thank you all for joining the celebration. I wish you all a very pleasant year ahead full of happiness and success.

Thank you