

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE BANQUET HOSTED IN HONOUR OF
THE CROWN PRINCE OF ABU DHABI AND DEPUTY
SUPREME COMMANDER OF UAE ARMED FORCES, HIS
HIGHNESS SHEIKH MOHAMMED BIN ZAYED AL NAHYAN**

Rashtrapati Bhavan: January 25, 2017

Your Highness, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome Your Highness and the esteemed members of your distinguished delegation to India.

I warmly recall your visit to India - nearly a year ago, and am happy to receive you once again - this time as our honoured Chief Guest as we celebrate India's 68th Republic Day.

Your State Visit is a testimony to our enduring bonds and time-tested friendship. Our engagement today is driven by remarkable similarities in the aspirations of our two peoples and the ideals on which our two nations are based.

Your Highness,

India's relations with United Arab Emirates, a country to which we are geographically and culturally close, are deeply rooted in history. We have, in recent times, expanded our ties into a wide-ranging relationship of political, economic, energy, defence and security co-operation. It is a matter of immense satisfaction that we have, today, signed a Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and that we both desire to develop it to its maximum potential.

The historic visits of your respected father, His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan to India in 1975 and 1992 and my predecessor, President Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil to the UAE in November 2010 had placed our bilateral ties on a firm footing. The landmark visit of Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, to your beautiful country in August, 2015 and the return visit of Your Highness in February, 2016 have elevated our engagement to a level that makes us set our sights even higher.

Your Highness,

India deeply values the United Arab Emirates as a trusted and reliable partner in India's energy security. We welcome your participation in establishing our Strategic Petroleum Reserves. We seek

a deeper energy partnership with you - in the form of joint ventures in refineries and petrochemicals projects in India , participation of our companies in upstream projects in your country and joint exploration in third countries.

The UAE is amongst our top trading partners. Our economic and commercial relations are today more broad-based than ever before, encompassing a wide range of products and services. With our plans for rapid growth in the infrastructure sector, our Government's liberalisation of foreign direct investment and as one of the fast growing economies in the world, India holds immense possibilities for investments. I take this opportunity to reiterate India's invitation to business houses of the United Arab Emirates to participate in our flagship projects like the "Make in India", "Digital India" and "Smart Cities" programmes. We look forward to a robust partnership with you in our National Infrastructure Investment Fund.

We, in India, rejoice at the giant strides of progress and prosperity made by our friends in the United Arab Emirates. The Indian private sector is pleased to have made substantial investments in your country. Our companies are globally reputed and have rich experience in executing infrastructure projects of the highest standards. They are keen to partner in the preparations for the World EXPO 2020 in Dubai.

It is a matter of satisfaction that even as we strengthen our ongoing engagement and co-operation , our Governments are currently exploring new avenues to expand it. Joint defence production, space and renewable energy have been identified as priorities as we proceed.

Your Highness,

The United Arab Emirates have generously embraced a large number of Indian expatriates and have encouraged them to flourish and prosper, for which we sincerely thank you. The positive contribution of this community to the development and progress of their host country has been well acknowledged and appreciated. We are confident of your continued support in ensuring their safety and well-being.

I take this opportunity to reiterate the urgent need for responsible nations such as ours to continue our collective efforts against the forces of extremism, terrorism and intolerance which attempt to weaken the very fabric of our societies. It is in our shared interest to work for peace and stability in both West Asia as well as South Asia.

Your Highness, our people value the friendship of the United Arab Emirates. We deeply appreciate your commitment to enhancing our bilateral co-operation across the board – and the personal contribution of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the

United Arab Emirates, in strengthening our relations to a close comprehensive partnership. We wish His Highness, the President, good health and a long and happy life.

With these words, I once again welcome Your Highness and wish you and your delegation a fruitful visit to India.