

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Evening - Namaskar

Let me first of all extend a very warm welcome to all of you. We are very grateful that you could find time to join us at our Republic Day reception today. This is the first time since 2020 that we are able to do so and the first National Day reception that I am hosting since I came to Brussels in July 2020. We are also delighted that we have such a large gathering, the fact that all of you are able to join us to mark the 74th Republic Day of India.

The past year and this one are particularly special for us, because we are marking a number of anniversaries. The first one is of course the Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav or 75 years of India's independence, which we have been celebrating since 2021. Last year, we also marked 75 years of diplomatic ties between India and Belgium and India and Luxembourg. And if that is not enough we are also commemorating 60 years of India-EU diplomatic ties as well.

Friends,

Those of you who may not know, this day is marked as Republic day in India because this is the day when we adopted our constitution and chose to become a Republic. And to think of it that on this day we gave to themselves a Constitution that became the bedrock on which India's democracy has flourished and became a beacon for a large part of the world as one of the brightest and most vibrant examples of peoples-driven governance. This day therefore we thank our founding fathers and also the framers of our constitution for bequeathing to us the democratic form of governance – a form of governance that we are unwilling to exchange for any other and of which we remain extremely proud. Looking back over the last 2-3 years, one has to acknowledge that they have been incredibly difficult for all of us worldwide. Amidst all the gloom, however, I must say there were bright spots too and India witnessed its fair share of that during this period.

We became last year the fastest growing major economy in the world. We also rose to become the 5th largest economy surpassing the UK. Just to illustrate the enormity of the change this represents, we were placed in the 11th position just ten years ago. Also, we remain on track to becoming the third largest economy before the end of this decade. Our economic reforms and investment friendly policies have ensured that we are one of the most attractive investment destinations. Riding on supply chain concerns and our growing investment attractiveness, we remain optimistic about India emerging as the factory of the world. Indeed, we seem to be at the cusp of a massive manufacturing and infrastructure boom.

Our new resourcefulness is most reflected in the fact that we carried out the world's biggest vaccination programme to combat Covid by administering 2.2 billion shots - in fact we administered 25 million shots on a single day as part of this drive on 17 September 2021. India was perhaps the only large developing country to be able to vaccinate over 80% of its adult population and that too based not on imported but

made in India vaccines. That we supplied vaccines and medicines to over 100 nations speaks for itself as well. Another example of this resourcefulness was evacuation of about 7 million Indians in 2020-21, who were stranded abroad due to Covid-19 pandemic. Examples such as these are growing with our growing capabilities.

Even in the IT sector, where India's pre-eminence has a long standing, the last few years have been remarkable. The India stack that we are offering to the rest of the world as part of our G-20 Presidency is an example. On the commercial side, this translates into India's indigenous 5G solutions, which we continue to implement in India and are prepared to share with those seeking it. The digital stack also includes the digital payments infrastructure that India has built as public goods. This has led to India witnessing a massive increase in digital financial transactions in 2022, which in terms of numbers alone is more than the EU, the US and China combined. There is also a social side of the digital stack which has enabled India to build and implement social safety nets for the poorest during the Covid crisis and which now is taking a more permanent shape. Its size and scale is unprecedented especially for a developing country. It includes extending food supplies to 800 million of the most vulnerable Indians, making cash grants directly into the bank accounts of the poorest 400 million Indians or extending free medical insurance cover to over 500 million underprivileged – all this on a digital platform. The effect that the digital stack has had on efficiency of delivery and the extent to which it has empowered the most vulnerable is unmatched. We hope to share our success in this regard with the rest of the world - with all those who wish to make use of these offerings by India.

Another area which has been a bright spot has been India's actions on clean energy and climate. Not many know that today, 42% of India's energy capacity is from non-fossil sources. The target for 2030 as part of India's updated INDCs under the Paris Agreement is to take it to over 50%, including producing 500GW of energy from non-fossil sources. The growing emphasis on clean energy now includes an ambitious programme of converting India into a Green Hydrogen hub by 2030. According to our Minister of Power, billions have already been pledged by private sector players aiming to build a capacity to produce 6 MTPA of Green Hydrogen and 32 MTPA of Green Ammonia by 2030. It is clear that if India were to be successful in achieving these goals, that alone would be a major contribution to the global green agenda. It also should not be a surprise obviously that India is rated the highest amongst the G-20 countries for its achievements in relation to the Paris Agreement commitments. It is also regarded as the only G-20 country that is 2 degree Celsius goal compliant. We are also taking our green and resilience agenda forward through the establishment of International Solar Alliance, the Coalition for Disaster resilient Infrastructure and most recently through the launch of a new initiative called LIFE or Lifestyle for Environment by Prime Minister of India Mr. Narendra Modi in 2022.

Our growing national capabilities are also reflected in our readiness to play a more constructive role at the global level. As a reflection of this, the last two years saw India contributing actively through its membership of the UNSC, in particular on issues of counter-terrorism, reformed multilateralism and peace and security. Even as India's term at the UNSC was ending, in December last year, India took over as

the Chair of the G-20. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi has stated at Bali in November 2022, our G-20 Presidency will be “inclusive, ambitious, decisive and action-oriented”. We will speak for the Global South and for those nations in the developing world whose voice remain unheard at the global table. We will pursue our Presidency under the theme, “One Earth, One family, One Future” guided by our ancient Sanskrit ethos of Vausdhaiva Kutumbakam” or the Earth is one Family”. We consider that it is a great privilege for us to have the opportunity to shape the global agenda at a time of increasing polarization and escalation of geo-political tensions, to advance peace, stability and shared prosperity.

The last 2-3 years have also been important in injecting new energy in our strategic partnership with the EU. The India-EU Summit in July 2020, the India-EU-27 Leaders meeting in May 2021 and visit of President of the European Commission to India in April 2022 are a reflection of high level interactions that has characterised our relationship in recent years. Our political exchanges with every one of the EU member states has also witnessed unprecedented intensification in the last 2-3 years. Arguably, India has engaged Europe as a region much more during this time than any other region in the world. Our trade and investment ties are being advanced through resumption of negotiations for separate trade and investment agreements.

The establishment of the Trade and Technology Council further seeks to provide a high-level political steer to our partnership. It will also provide direction to our digital and clean energy cooperation. Our security and defence partnership is also being advanced through joint naval exercises and initiating regular dialogues on security and defence, especially on maritime security. Our connectivity partnership announced in 2021 is also finding traction following the announcement of Global Gateway and Indo-Pacific Strategy by the EU. We are looking ahead to 2023 with strong optimism seeking to advance across the board with the EU in what is one of India’s most broad-based strategic partnerships.

Our relations with Belgium and Luxembourg have also grown significantly. Belgium emerged as the second largest trade partner of India in the EU with bilateral trade crossing USD 20 billion for the first time last year. Our partnerships on water, health, renewable energy, IT and education continues to grow. Last year, we added yet another dimension to our ties with Belgium emerging as our principal partner on semiconductors as India seeks to establish its first semiconductor chip making facility. Luxembourg, too, has emerged as a source of green financing for India’s ongoing green transition and has also advanced its investments into India in green steel and other niche industries. We continue to pursue cooperation on migration and mobility with both these countries on the lines we have concluded with other EU countries such as France, Germany, Portugal and others. I have sought to provide a brief account of notable developments in India and in India-EU, India-Belgium and India-Luxembourg relations. The idea is to give you a flavour rather than enumerate a very comprehensive account. Overall, I can say that we remain bullish about India, and the prospects of our relationships with Europe and more specifically with the EU, Belgium and Luxembourg.

Let me conclude by thanking again all of you for joining us in our celebrations today. We value your support and encouragement and look forward to continue to work with all of you to advance our shared agenda.

Thank You.