

Keynote Address by High Commissioner Ruchira Kamboj at the 4th World Tamils Economic Conference at Durban, South Africa on 16 November 2017

On 16 November 1860, the first Indians in South Africa arrived on board the SS *Truro* as indentured labour from Chennai to work in the sugarcane plantations in Port Natal.

HM the King of the Zulu Nation;

HE the Vice President of Mauritius;

The Deputy Minister, Government of Tamil Nadu;

The Deputy Speaker, Puducherry;

Dr. Sampath;

Mr. Logie Naidoo;

The Consul General of India in Durban;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies & Gentlemen;

On 16 November 2017, it is my honour to stand here and welcome you all to the 4th World Tamil Economic Conference in Durban.

Durban ò .. which is Africa's busiest port and South Africa's most African city. Flavoured by British explorers, Indian diaspora & Zulu traditions.

Progress is not possible without change, and change is what is happening in India.

India has come a long way in 71 years of Independence.

In terms of its economic growth, India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world; in terms of its environmental efforts, it leads in conservation efforts including the Blue Revolution for bluer oceans and skies; in technology, with cost effective and influentially bold space programmes it has launched some of the most powerful rockets and satellites, as well as in its actions of tenacity and strength on Education for All.

And every day, it strives to edge towards a country devoid of poverty and hunger through the empowerment of its people.

As a consequence, India's efforts synchronize perfectly with those of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: monumental goals which aim to unify and dignify all.

These winds of change have not gone unnoticed. Very recently in its *Ease of Doing Business Report 2018*, the World Bank has acknowledged that there has been a significant jump in India's rankings, up by 30 points, 100 in 2017 to 130 in 2016.

It has been acknowledged that the business environment in India has improved at the 5th fastest pace in the world and India today is among the top 10 improvers globally having done better in 8 out of 10 business parameters.

The country has jumped 53 places from 170 to 119 on Ease of Doing Business, leapt over to the fourth rank of protecting minority investors and has moved 15 places from 44 to 29 on Ease of Businesses getting credit.

The most significant jump is in taxation policy parameters.

These changes are significant. They are an important barometer of India moving in the right direction and in creating channels that will attract investment.

These changes are also a vindication of India's reform policies under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is no coincidence that this Forum is being held on South African soil, a country with which India has a unique connection.

That ANC stalwart, whose 100th Birth Anniversary we celebrate this year, Oliver Tambo, had spoken of a *%golden thread+* that binds India and South Africa. President Nelson Mandela in speaking of Mahatma Gandhi had stated *%the soul of India lies in South Africa+*.

But it is not just the past that we are proud of, it is the future that holds full promise.

Since 1994 at the end of apartheid, bilateral trade has emboldened, cultural bonds have deepened and people-to-people contacts have solidified.

The dialogue across the BRICS, IBSA, IORA and the G-20 groupings on topics as diverse as multilateral reform, security matters and trade relations

adds further dimension and extensity to a dynamic India-South Africa relationship.

My respects and gratitude to HM the King of the Zulus, the Premier of KwaZulu Natal and the Mayor of Durban for honouring this partnership in being here today.

Above all, my respects to the Tamil Diaspora in South Africa. You are the ones who stayed on, thrived and made South Africa your home. You firmly established yourselves in South Africa and made your mark. Trade and commerce is not new to you. Back in time you have traded with Roman Emperors. The Chola Kings had robust trading links with the Chinese Song Dynasty and South East Asia. You have travelled across the world and you have made a niche for yourselves : in India, your grandmother country and South Africa, your mother country!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the next few days, we will see brilliance through the rich menu of speakers at this event. As we converge and through a cross fertilization as we will generate fresh vision, ideas and suggestions we echo the spirit and meaning of Sangam philosopher Kaniyan Poongundranar's statements : *%Yaa-dhum Oore, Yaa-Varum Kelir*±. The WORLD IS MY VILLAGE, ALL FOLK ARE MY FRIENDS.

I wish the deliberations and the Conference much success.

Thank You.