

Embassy of India

Tokyo

Remarks by Ambassador Sibi George at the Celebration of Indian Harvest Festivals at the Embassy Auditorium, Embassy of India, Japan

16 January 2023

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Afternoon.

I am delighted to welcome you all to today's celebrations on the occasion of our harvest festivals which include Lohri, Bhogali Bihu, Makar Sankranti, Pongal and Uttarayan. I congratulate the Indian Cultural Center team here in Tokyo for organizing this event.

Dear Friends,

2. On such an auspicious occasion which heralds the harvest in many parts of India and signifies a new beginning for all, we must take a moment to pause and cheer ourselves up. This is all the more important in the times we are living in, where we face many difficulties and challenges associated with COVID 19 pandemic and make a new beginning towards health, peace and prosperity for all.

3. By celebrating these festivals, we are also celebrating our history, our civilizational ethos, our family values and above all the spirit of vasudaiva kudumbakam that we are all proud of. We have a responsibility to bring up our children and grandchildren realizing and appreciating the values of our festivals, the values of positivity, vibrancy, brotherhood and harmony.

4. As citizens of India and proud Indians we also have a responsibility to tell the whole world about our rich culture and traditions. I recall an experience that I had in Switzerland. I was addressing a reputed diplomatic school in Geneva. Present were the faculty and students from many countries, mostly European countries. As I was speaking on India's Foreign Policy, I thought it is important to start with a basic question. A question about our two pioneer diplomats in ancient India. I asked them whether they heard about our epic 'Ramayana', where Lord Hanuman, as a messenger of Lord Rama travelled all the way to Lanka and try to avoid a war with King Ravana. I also asked them whether they heard about our epic 'Mahabharata' where Lord Krishna tried to avoid the war between Pandavas and Kaurvas.

5. I also asked them whether they heard about Arthasastra by Kautilya our Chanakya written several hundreds of years before Machiavelli wrote his world famous The Prince. I was surprised to know that many of the students had not heard about Ramayana or Mahabharata or Arthasastra. Of course, many of them had a lot of knowledge about India, some even practiced yoga and even tried some form of Ayurveda. But not many knew about our epics or our festivals.

6. I am convinced that we need to do more work in spreading our message and our civilizational values abroad including in Japan. In India, we have a rich and varied culture, a continuous civilization, which we are all proud of. As a nation of festivals and celebrations, we are committed to celebrate every Indian festival here. We will also together remember, honor and pay homage to every Indian hero. We are determined to celebrate our unity in diversity.

7. I recall the remarks of Hon'ble Prime Minister who in his address to the Indian community in Japan said, I quote: "Today 130 crore people from India and I am seeing the same in the eyes of the people

sitting in Japan, the confidence of 130 crore countrymen, 130 crore resolve, 130 crore dreams and this immense power to fulfil these 130 crore dreams is sure to give result my friends. We will see the India of our dreams. Today India is regaining its lost faith in its civilization, its culture, its institutions. Today, every Indian across the world is talking about India with great pride, with eyes wide open. This change has come." Unquote.

8. In Japan, the celebrations of our 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations and 75th anniversary of our independence, Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, provide us with a unique occasion to celebrate India here. We have a series of events planned to commemorate the 70th and 75th anniversaries till August 15. I invite you to follow us on social media handles to know about the many events that we plan to organize in coming weeks and months. I invite you all to join hands with our embassy to celebrate India in Japan, together let's celebrate every festival of India here. I also invite you all to join me at the flag hoisting ceremony on January 26 at 9 AM. Let's together celebrate our national day.

9. Once again I wish you greetings of our harvest festivals.

Thank you.
