Embassy of India Tashkent

Address by Ambassador of India H.E. Mr. Santosh Jha Republic Day Reception 24 January 2020

Ladies and gentlemen

- 1. I have great pleasure in welcoming you to what happens to be the first National Day reception in this New Year in Tashkent. Let me extend my warmest wishes to all of you for a very happy and joyous 2020. I would also like to thank you all for your presence here today. I am particularly thankful that our Chief Guest H.E Mr. Abdulla Aripov, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Uzbekistan could find time to grace this occasion. His presence along with other senior dignitaries from the Government of Uzbekistan sends a clear signal of the high priority that UZBEKISTAN accords to our strategic partnership. Thank you Excellencies. We are deeply gratified. As you are aware, we are marking the 71st Republic Day of India, which is indeed a very special day for us Indians. On 26 January 1950, we, the people of India, gave to ourselves a constitution that established India as a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic. It laid the foundation of what is now the world's largest democracy and also one of the most vibrant ones.
- 2. In a testimony to that, last year, India undertook the largest electoral exercise in human history. The National General Elections that we witnessed during seven weeks between 11 April and 19 May 2019 saw participation by more than 650 political parties and over 8000 candidates in 542 constituencies. It required setting up over 1 million polling stations and installing about 4 million electronic voting machines. There were over 900 million eligible voters of which over 600 million or 67% of the voters actually exercised their right to vote. For the first time in India's history, the elections saw both men and women turning out to vote in equal proportion.
- 3. The elections were a reaffirmation of India's impeccable democratic credentials. It brought the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi back to power with an even bigger mandate than it had received five years ago in 2014.

The results were an endorsement of our Prime Minister's vision and leadership and his ongoing campaign to transform the country and build a New India.

- 4. This unprecedented change that we are witnessing in India is manifested first and foremost in the emergence of India as the fifth largest economy in the world in 2019, rising from the 11th position it held in 2014. Taking this forward, the Government has now set a target to make India into a **five-trillion-dollar economy** by 2024. India has already emerged as a favoured destination for foreign investment having received FDI worth over 280 billion US dollars during the last five years. Sustained and incremental reforms have seen India rise in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index from 142 in 2014 to 63 in 2019. The much needed investment in the infrastructure sector in India is finally beginning to happen. The Government has announced plans to invest **1.4 trillion US dollars** in infrastructure on top of an investment of **1.1 trillion US dollars** made in the last ten years.
- 5. India's record in achieving sustainable and inclusive development has also been quite remarkable. According to a recent UNDP report, India has lifted 270 million Indians out of poverty between 2006 and 2016. India is well on its way to achieving its target of generating 175 GW of electricity from green and renewable sources by 2022 and this has enabled us to set a revised target of sourcing 500 GW or 40% of our energy requirements from renewable sources in 2030. This impressive performance has led India to being ranked amongst the top 10 performers in the world on Climate Action, ahead of all other big countries.

- 6. The Government has also registered significant success in social sectors as reflected in targeted programmes for areas such as health, sanitation, affordable housing, women's empowerment and financial and digital inclusion. As a developing country, India has implemented the world's biggest sanitation campaign by building over 110 million toilets that have benefitted 600 million people in the last five years. Huge strides have been made in rural electrification, with all Indian villages now connected to the electricity grid. The same holds true of affordable housing, where we are on target to build 20 million homes by 2022 to ensure housing for all Indians. India has also successfully implemented the world's largest health insurance scheme giving 500 million of its poorest the facility of free medical treatment. It has also implemented the world's largest financial inclusion scheme, opening over 370 million bank accounts for the poor in just five years. With practically every family in the banking net, 1.2 billion Indians as part of the biometric database called Aadhar, and with 1.2 billion mobile phone connections, we are on the cusp of a digital and fin-tech revolution. It has also enabled the Government to transfer cash benefits directly to the poor under its 425 welfare schemes thereby reducing leakages of tax payer's money, eliminating corruption and enforcing transparency. In a reflection of a resurgence of the entrepreneurial skills and spirit of innovation among India's youthful millions, India has emerged as the third largest Startup ecosystem in the world.
- 7. Our foreign policy, too, has witnessed a new energy and vigour marked by an unprecedented outreach, consolidation of existing relationships and the building and strengthening of new ones. This is fully reflected in recent developments in our strategic partnership with Uzbekistan. In many ways, 2019 has been a "take off" year in India-Uzbekistan relations. As President Mirziyoyev said in his remarks at the presentation of my credentials in September last year, "India-Uzbekistan relations have never been better before". And I may add that the prospects are even better.
- 8. Today, we are working on political and strategic issues such as our shared interests in dealing with common threats of radicalism, extremism and terrorism. 2019 witnessed the first ever bilateral consultations between the National Security Councils of the two countries and a visit by the Uzbek Minister of Internal Affairs to India. These have resulted in decisions to further deepen our cooperation on security issues, including regular visits, the exchange of information and best practices, training and capacity building.

- 9. A similar trend is visible in our defence cooperation. In November 2019, we saw the first visit by India's Defence Minister to Uzbekistan in 15 years. This coincided with the first ever joint military exercises on counter terrorism. Earlier in February 2019, we held the first-ever meeting of the Joint Working Group on Defence. The two countries are now actively implementing their agreements for cooperation in the field of Military Medicine and Military Education, including in areas such as training and capacity building. Our defence-industrial cooperation, too, received a boost with the holding of the first ever workshop in Tashkent in September 2019 to explore opportunities for industrial collaboration. To support such activities, India has also offered a Line of Credit of **40 million US dollars** to Uzbekistan.
- 10. As countries in the midst of economic change and transformation, our two countries naturally accord high priority to promotion of our trade and economic cooperation. In September 2019, we signed a Joint Statement to set up a Joint Study Group to establish the feasibility of entering into a Preferential Trade Agreement. We are working closely to provide greater access to each other's agricultural products for exports. We are interested in establishing air transport corridors between India and Uzbekistan even as we endeavour to promote terrestrial connectivity between our two countries. Direct air connectivity between India and Uzbekistan is already boosting tourism numbers and we are working to further enhance such links.
- 11. Our investment relationship, too, has received a considerable boost last year, in particular, following the visit to Uzbekistan of a multi-sectoral business delegation in October 2019 led by the Chief Minister of the Indian state of Gujarat. A number of agreements and investment proposals in a wide range of sectors have emerged through these exchanges and are being pursued vigorously.
- 12. An important area of cooperation between India and Uzbekistan has been to support efforts towards capacity building, education and training of professionals from Uzbekistan. In October 2019, Sharda and Amity Universities from India opened their campuses in Andijan and Tashkent, respectively. We continue to expand our Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme for Uzbekistan, under which, over the past two decades over 2000 Uzbek professionals have been trained in different disciplines, including in specialized ones. We also continue to offer several scholarships every year for under-graduate, graduate and doctoral programmes in prestigious Indian universities and institutions. We are extending our support to Uzbekistan at the newly set up IT Techno Park in Tashkent through the deployment of an Indian expert to help with its further expansion and

development. We seek to promote youth exchanges through the organisation of a Youth Festival in Uzbekistan in 2020. We also have plans to celebrate Days of India in Uzbekistan and Days of Uzbekistan in India in 2020. Our strong people-to-people ties based on centuries of interaction and mutual goodwill will witness considerable strengthening through these efforts.

- 13. Yet another area in which we have sought to expand our cooperation with Uzbekistan is in the field of infrastructure development. For this purpose, India has offered a concessional line of credit of **one billion US dollars** to Uzbekistan. An agreement for a line of credit of **200 million US dollars** is already in place since January 2019. India has also offered to support small community development projects in Uzbekistan through grants-in-aid. Projects in various areas, based on Uzbekistan's development priorities, are under consideration.
- 14. The robust progress in our bilateral relations has been enabled by the strong personal chemistry between our two leaders Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. In fact, the recent upgradation in our relations have been a result of visits by Prime Minister Modi to Tashkent in July 2015 and June 2016 and by President Mirziyoyev in October 2018 and January 2019. These have built a new level of trust and comfort between the two countries. The decisions arrived at during these high-level visits have set us firmly on course for achieving our shared objectives for a stronger strategic partnership. We look forward to continuing high-level exchanges and stronger outcomes in 2020 and beyond.
- 15. Once again, I thank all of you for your presence here today. To conclude, allow me to raise a toast to the health and well-being of our respective leaders and to ever stronger strategic and fraternal ties between the friendly peoples of our two countries.
