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**ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONSULATE GENERAL
OF INDIA IN DURBAN CELEBRATING
INDIA'S REPUBLIC DAY**

CP 86K

**ADDRESS BY
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DURBAN CITY HALL: JANUARY 26, 1999

I congratulate the Honourable M.K. Lokesh, the Consul General of India in Durban, on the occasion of India's Republic Day. It is an honour for me to join you once again to share in this celebration. I always take it as an honour to share with the Consulate and influential leaders in the Province, events such as these, for I feel that I am in good company here. I have shared with the Indian community of Durban, and all our province, a long-standing friendship and a continuing dialogue of mutual respect and co-operation. As the representative of the Indian people, the Consulate holds a special place in my heart and I thank the Honourable Consul General for his kind invitation to me on this celebratory occasion.

I have great respect for the Republic of India which for generations was in the forefront of our liberation struggle. I respect India for producing Mahatma Gandhi who is one of the founding fathers of our own liberation struggle. I respect India for blessing our country with so many South African leaders of Indian extraction who have contributed so much to our liberation struggle. This country and our Province of KwaZulu Natal has been more blessed to have such a progressive segment of our population of Indian extraction who have done so much for all our communities in KwaZulu Natal and in South Africa.

In keeping with the joyous atmosphere of this occasion I take great pleasure in thanking the musical troupe for travelling from India to bring to us this evening a Quawwali musical performance. I applaud your participation in this celebration for I know that your excellent talent is recognised in India. I have always loved music and it remains an important part of my every day life. To me, music speaks in a language comprehensible to all who find that harmony fills their soul. Through music, hearts are opened to receive a message of cultural celebration, even foreign to one's own. I know, therefore, that I speak on behalf of each person gathered here this evening to share this celebration, when I thank the troupe for this unique experience.

I have shared so many years of my life with the Indian community of KwaZulu Natal and I have always been struck by the vibrancy and unity of a people who maintain such close ties to their ancestral home. Even though for most among this community your children are born in South Africa, they are never removed from the cultural bond which ties them to their roots. I have a profound respect for the

strength of this tradition for I have always believed that nothing can replace a true sense of identity and that, regardless of where you find yourself, you will always be at home so long as you can identify the social context to which you belong. I believe that, if anything, these ties make members of the Indian community better South Africans and even the more truly South African. It is of paramount importance that tradition be preserved and that culture flourishes, no matter how far removed it may seem from its original context both in time and space.

I always feel that the Indian community in this Province has put its stamp on me and I am a better South African for it. I know that there is tremendous benefit in the experience of other cultures and I have found that I have much to share and gain from interaction with the Indian community. We act through a shared understanding of our day-to-day experience within South Africa and on countless occasions in the past we have worked together towards common goals. Our cooperation has continued uninterrupted for many years and I am led to believe that while we remain strong within our own culture, we have merged as South Africans into the common arena of our experience. Therefore, as I join you today in celebration of the Independence of the Republic Day of India, I know that what we celebrate extends beyond the respect of a cultural experience upheld, to become the respect we have for one another as equal stakeholders in our shared past, present, and future.

With this knowledge of our shared experience I feel at liberty to speak of the anticipation we all feel as we approach the national and provincial elections in South Africa. As our second democratic elections, this year's elections remain perhaps more important, and certainly more destiny-determining, than any held in the past. The 1994 election was heralded throughout the world as the greatest event in the history of South Africa's people, and yet that day was predetermined from the moment we first stood up and refused to accept our oppression. Apartheid could not last by virtue of it being contrary to the righteous striving of all humankind towards the freedom of the body, the mind and the soul. No country in the world would support this system and, even internally, support began to crumble as our determined passive resistance and unfaltering high moral ground began to open eyes to the immorality and inhumanity of a system wholly evil in construction.

Since the early 1950's I worked closely with the communities of KwaZulu Natal to develop a vision which, rather than separating us with artificially imposed divides, could harmonise the diversity of South Africans without levelling it, or ignoring it through forced uniformity. This long process of harmonisation reached some of its major milestones in the Buthelezi Commission which I established in 1980, and the KwaZulu/Natal Indaba of 1986, which then led to the establishment of the Joint Executive Authority of KwaZulu and Natal, South Africa's first inter-racial government. The Indian community was an active participant in this process. This was of course preceded by many years of my participation in the politics of the Congress Alliance in the 50's under our great leaders, such as Inkosi Albert Lutuli, Dr Monty Naicker, Mr Debhi Singh and Mr Ismail Meer, to name just a few of the leaders who contributed towards making me the kind of person that I am.

I recall how, during the dark days of the liberation struggle, we stood united by the inspiration and vision of the Mahatma Gandhi, who formed the Natal Indian Congress to unite all Indians. Even when I was a militant in the ANC Youth League

I remember often discussing with my good friend, Mr Ismail Meer, the inspirational leadership of Dr Monty Naicker who was one of the prominent leaders of the Natal Indian Congress and a Gandhian. I met Ismail Meer through his then fiancé, Fatima, with whom I attended Sastri College, which I still consider to be one of my *alma matres* after my rustication from Fort Hare University. I have walked the path of liberation together with the Indian community and the notions which we developed during those days for the future of our country, continue to be discussed amongst us. Some years ago I was invited to address the Gandhian Memorial Lecture at Gandhi House in Phoenix and I was deeply inspired to hear these same notions of full and true liberation moved into the present.

In April 1994, the time had come for the fortress of apartheid to fall, for the waves of truth and righteousness had worn away the last brick of its foundations. The time had come for democracy and the coming of the first democratic elections could not have been averted. At that point, our destiny was determined by an unstoppable force for right. This time around in the next elections, however, it is up to us to choose the path of our destiny. It is our responsibility as liberated South Africans to take hold of the reins of our new democracy and steer South Africa according to the way we want things to be. For this reason, the forthcoming elections will be more destiny-determining even than 1994. We have crushed apartheid, we have achieved democracy, and we now need a strong leadership to re-establish a new South Africa through the will of its people. I have not come to this function to canvass political support but it would be strange for me to speak at this prestigious function three months before elections without sharing my thinking with you as my compatriots.

Since 1994, we have basked in the glory of political liberation. Yet the time has come to take a good look at where we are now and ask ourselves whether we have moved - not far enough away from our past of oppression - but near enough towards full and final liberation. Our final liberation is what we sought from the start: liberation from ignorance, criminality, unemployment, degradation, poverty and a lack of basic resources and services such as hospitals, schools, libraries, universities, clinics, health-care, electrification and housing. We cannot accept a halt in the journey towards this dream of final liberation simply because we have reached the first milestone. I suggest that we have not come far enough in our journey, for the obstacles which we sought to overcome then, remain those which now plague our path forward.

We need to look at who we have leading us for we know from our victories in the past that the people are the body which completes the task, but the leadership is the head which directs the movement. During our struggle we could not have achieved what we did without a strong and moral leadership rooted in a framework of liberation from oppression. Yet I believe that the greatest virtue of a leader is the ability to be a leader in context, to have the objectives suited to the issues of the day. We need therefore to now choose a leadership which is focused not on the past, but on the future, so that we will be able to fulfil the dream of a prosperous South Africa which we made to our children's children. We need to ensure that through the fulfilment of our original dream, the only limitations of our progeny will be those which they impose upon themselves.

There is no one party or power which can claim status as liberator for this would deny and disrespect the sacrifice and true role which many of us played in the struggle. Side by side we fought, offering our lives and enduring untold human

sufferings. It would be an insult to many who helped to bring down the past, for any one people to claim sovereignty over the destruction of our past and therefore also to claim sovereignty over the creation of our future. We must fully recognise the contribution given to our struggle by the Indian community. The coming elections will give to us the opportunity to choose a new leadership which we trust to carry forward the dream without being bound by the old propaganda. We need a strong, reliable, experienced, efficient leadership which shared the past and prepares for the future. Above all, we must decide if, in our future, we want to continue to rest on our laurels, or if we want to move closer to the realisation of true liberation by taking control of our future.

I have never believed that one central government can make decisions for a multi-faceted and multi-cultural society, either without determining from the people what they want, or for the sake of setting up a show-case unity. That is not what democracy is all about. Particularly within the context of our South African diversity, a centralist, autocratic system of governance cannot take into account the on-the-ground needs and aspirations of its people. I believe that we need to empower communities so that communities can govern themselves with the interaction and contribution of individuals and organisations at all levels of the social fibre. It is a bottom-up approach which we need if we are to ensure that each person takes control of their own destiny, seeks with positive expectation and action for their needs to be met, and works with a sense of unity for the general good of all South Africans.

Communities throughout South Africa have so much to offer in the way of ideas, concerns, aspirations, needs and solutions. Whenever I come into the Indian community I am again convinced of the profound contribution which individuals and communities can make towards the future success of our country. I have always known that our best hope for economic prosperity and social stability lies in ensuring that all of us have a personal stake to claim in our collective future. The old South Africa was built by the blood and sweat of many, for the benefit of only a few. We need to make certain that we do not allow a new chosen few to dominate our future according to their own motivations and self-fulfilment exercises. We need to rebuild a new South Africa, built by us all for the benefit of us all. The only means to achieve this goal is to see everyone becoming involved from community level upwards. To this end we need the contribution of the Indian community. Without this contribution, alone we would not succeed.

I have maintained close ties to the Indian community in South Africa for many years because I witness in this community a strength which comes from unity and co-operation. I believe that the very values and motivations which we need to usher a future of hope, stability and prosperity, are those inherent in the Indian community. The ingenuity, dedication and industry of Indians should be an example to all South Africans. This celebration of India's Republic Day provides proof of both the sense of dignity and identity which guides Indians. Yet there is further evidence offered every day within this province of KwaZulu Natal in particular, and throughout South Africa, of the motivated benefit flowing from the activities of the Indian community into many spheres of South Africa's progress.

Undoubtedly, one of the major areas of benefit remains the economic arena. The Indian community has brought to Durban a tremendous wealth through a display of business acumen and economic sensibility of a degree which I have witnessed in few other peoples. My constant and ongoing dialogue with members of the

diplomatic corps and with many Indian businessmen, has given rise to a clear perception of the great and still largely unexplored potential for economic, social and cultural exchange which could bring South Africa and India closer together, fostering our respective growth and prosperity. It is for this reason that I took great encouragement from the bilateral agreements signed during the October 1997 visit of the former Prime Minister of India, Mr Inder K. Gujral, in the fields of geology, mineral resources, tourism, science and technology. Such agreements open the way for further positive growth and development.

My intellectual affinity with the Indian community is also deeply rooted in our shared understanding of the political needs of South Africa. Through maintaining close ties with India, which has experienced much of what we in South Africa are experiencing now, this community has a personal knowledge of what is required to accelerate economic growth and motivate social upliftment. I have always admired how India has developed original solutions to fundamental issues such as those relating to the devolution of powers and regional autonomy, assistance to small and medium enterprises, parallel development of both the formal and informal sectors of the economy, rural development based on self-help and self-reliance, employment generation programmes and many other issues which now confront South Africa. These are the ideals to which I have committed the greater part of my life.

I believe that the fact that South Africa, like India, has emerged out of a struggle for liberation and independence, creates a common legacy which binds us in a common understanding. Throughout the years it has been a great pleasure for me to share the concerns, aspirations, interests, sorrows and celebrations of the Indian community. It is my deepest desire that our dialogue may continue along the same vein of ever-increasing respect, co-operation and friendship for many years to come. On this occasion, therefore, I offer the Indian community and the Consulate General of India my warmest felicitations for the celebration of the Republic Day of India.