**Welcome remarks by Dr. Rajesh Ranjan, High Commissioner of India to Botswana on the occasion of ICCR Foundation Day on 9th April 2019 at Maharaja Conference Centre, Gaborone**

* Hon. Ms. Gladys K.T. Kokorwe, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Botswana
* ICCR Alumni
* Protocol observed
* Media Personnel
* Ladies and Gentlemen

**Good Evening,**

**Dumela,**

* Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to Hon. Speaker Mrs. Kokorwe for gracing this event.
* I also take this opportunity to gladly acknowledge the support extended by Government of Botswana in achieving new heights in India-Botswana academic and educational cooperation.
* I am happy for the presence of colleagues from Ministry of International Affairs and Cooperation and from the National Assembly of the Republic of Botswana of the Republic of Botswana.
* I extend a warm welcome to ICCR Alumni and colleagues from various Ministries/Departments.
* Today is an important day for the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). When we first founded the ICCR in 1950, it was with the objective of fostering and strengthening cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries and to promote cultural exchanges with people.
* Through this cross fertilization of ideas, ideals and cultures, we have not only fostered the goal of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, i.e. considering the world as one family, but we have also created a huge cadre of ICCR alumni today who are infused with the same spirit of enlightened globalization.
* The quest for knowledge has always been a fundamental value of Indian culture and civilization. Since time immemorial our country has attracted knowledge-seekers and inquisitive minds from all over the world.
* In the *Vedic* time our *Rishis* were not only the embodiment of wisdom. They were in fact institutions disseminating knowledge among their followers and disciples. Post-Vedic period showed the emergence of number of institutions of world repute.
* World-renowned seats of learning like *Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramashila, Valabhi, Somapura and Odantapuri* dominated the education system and acted as magnets for the finest minds and scholars in the world.
* Alumni of Indian centers of learning - Megasthenes to Hiuen Tsang, Fa Hien, Hyecho and Al-Barauni not only spread Indian knowledge system all over the world, but they are also remembered for their contributions towards development of human civilization.
* I am proud that India has continued and continues to be a centre for learning. We host thousands of students from 160 countries in our educational and research institutions. Many of them come on ICCR scholarships.
* The alumni of Indian institutions are playing a leading role in different fields across the world. In the field of politics, for example, Bangladesh PM Hon’ble Sheikh Hasina, Myanmar’s leader Hon’ble Aung San Suu Kyi, Afghanistan’s former President Hon’ble Hamid Karzai have studied in India and gone on to lead their countries.
* The alumni of ICCR also work as the goodwill ambassadors of India, for they have been in India for an extended period and have been a part of Indian traditions, festivals and systems. Hence when they return home after completion of their studies, they take back a bit of "India” with them.
* Coming to our development partnership with Botswana, traditionally, India’s vibrant and bilateral relationship with Botswana has a strong educational component.
* Our development partnership is guided by the priorities of Botswana and one of the important aspects of our cooperation is people-to-people contact. The main aspect of cooperation is capacity building which focuses on enhancing the potential of Botswanan talents and skills in a wide range of specialized areas so as to match the local opportunities for overall development.
* I am happy to state that partnering with our fellow developing countries such as Botswana is an important pillar of India´s foreign policy and approach to inter-State relations. We share with you our technologies, academic knowledge and experience to assist you in your march to national development.
* Last year, we have sent more than 200 students from Botswana to attend various courses in India.
* Dear ICCR alumni, as each of you have personally been a part of this caring, sharing and learning, I am sure that you have also imbibed a greater understanding of India and will act as a bridge to foster even closer bilateral relations between India and Botswana.

--Thank You—

--Pula--