

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

Remarks During a Radio Address With Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India and a Question-and-Answer Session in New Delhi, India

January 27, 2015

[Prime Minister Modi began his remarks in Hindi, but no transcript was provided. He continued in English as follows.]

Prime Minister Modi. I request President Barack Obama to say a few words.

President Obama. *Namaste.* Thank you, Prime Minister Modi, for your kind words and for the incredible hospitality you've shown me and my wife Michelle on this visit.

And let me say to the people of India how honored I am to be the first American President to join you for Republic Day. I'm told this is also the first-ever radio address by an Indian Prime Minister and an American President together, so we're making a lot of history in a short time.

To the people of India listening all across this great nation, it's wonderful to be able to speak to you directly. We just came from discussions in which we affirmed that India and the United States are natural partners, because we have so much in common. We're two great democracies, two innovative economies, two diverse societies dedicated to empowering individuals. We are linked together by millions of proud Indian Americans who still have family and carry on traditions from India. And I want to say to the Prime Minister how much I appreciate your strong personal commitment to strengthening the relationship between these two countries.

People are very excited in the United States about the energy that Prime Minister Modi is bringing to efforts in this country to reduce extreme poverty and lift people up, to empower women, to provide access to electricity and clean energy, and invest in infrastructure and the education system.

And on all these issue, we want to be partners. Because many of the efforts that I am promoting inside the United States to make sure that young people get the best education possible, to make sure that ordinary people are properly compensated for their labor and paid fair wages and have job security and health care—these are the same kinds of issues that Prime Minister Modi, I know, cares so deeply about here.

And I think there's a common theme in these issues. It gives us a chance to reaffirm what Gandhiji reminded us should be a central aim of our lives, and that is, we should endeavor to see God through service of humanity because God is in everyone. So these shared values, these convictions are a large part of why I'm so committed to this relationship. I believe that if the United States and India join together on the world stage around these values, then not only will our peoples be better off, but I think the world will be more prosperous and more peaceful and more secure for the future.

So thank you so much, Mr. Prime Minister, for giving me this opportunity to be with you here today.

Prime Minister Modi. Barack, the first question comes from Raj from Mumbai.

President Obama's Daughters

[Prime Minister Modi spoke in Hindi, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

A young doctor: "The whole world was about your affectionate love for your daughters. What do you plan to tell your daughters about your experiences in India? And do you plan to go shopping and buy things for them?"

President Obama. Well, first of all, they very much wanted to come. They are fascinated by India. Unfortunately, each time that I've taken a trip here they had school and they couldn't leave school. And in fact, Malia, my older daughter, had exams just recently.

So they are fascinated by the culture and the history of India, in part because of my influence, I think. They are deeply moved by India's movement to independence and the role that Gandhi played in not only the nonviolent strategies here in India, but how those ended up influencing the nonviolent civil rights movement in the United States.

So when I go back, I'm going to tell them that India is as magnificent as they imagined. And I am quite sure they're going to have to—going to insist that I bring them back the next time I visit. It may not be during my Presidency, but afterwards, they'll definitely want to come and visit.

And I will definitely do some shopping for them, although, I can't go to the stores myself, so I have to have my team do the shopping for me. And I'll get some advice from Michelle, because she probably has a better sense of what they would like.

[Prime Minister Modi spoke in Hindi, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

Prime Minister Modi. Barack said that he would bring his daughters, and I do believe you can bring them when you're the President or even after, but definitely, India looks forward to welcoming you and your daughters.

[Inaudible]—question: "You have started the Educate the Girl Child mission. Have you spoken to the President of the United States about this? Have you asked him for help about this?"

I think this is a very good question you've asked. The poor sex ratio in India is a cause of great concern. We have a sex ratio of a thousand boys, and in comparison to that the number of girls is very low. And even our way of looking at, or our perspective of viewing women and men, girls and boys, is something that needs to be rectified.

I think when we look at President Obama and the way in which he has brought up his two daughters, I think this is an inspiration for us. In our country, we have so many people, and we have so many families where there are no sons and they only have daughters, and they do bring up their daughters very proudly. And I think that is an inspiration. And I think this kind of inspiration can be a strength for us.

And since you've asked this question, I would like to say that Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child is a social responsibility that we have. It's a responsibility that we have towards our culture, it's a responsibility towards humanity.

[Prime Minister Modi spoke in English as follows.]

The second question for President Obama comes through e-mail: Dr. Kamlesh Upadhay, a doctor based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

India-U.S. Public Health Cooperation/First Lady Michelle Obama's Efforts To Combat Childhood Obesity/Global Health Improvement Efforts

[Prime Minister Modi spoke in Hindi, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

And I have another question which is also being addressed to Barack, and it's been addressed to me as well: "Your wife has been working on diseases like obesity and diabetes. She's been doing a lot of work in this field. These challenges are growing at a rapid pace in India, as well. So after leaving office, do you and the First Lady plan to or intend to come to India. For instance, as Bill Gates and Melinda Gates have taken up cleanliness as an issue in India, so do you think that you would work on obesity and diabetes?"

President Obama. Well, we very much look forward to partnering with organizations and the Government and nongovernmental organizations here in India around broader public health issues, including the issue of obesity.

I'm very proud of the work that Michelle has done on this issue. We're seeing a worldwide epidemic of obesity, in many cases starting at a very young age. Part of it has to do with the increase in processed foods, not naturally prepared. Part of it is the lack of activity for too many children. And once they're on this path, it can lead to a lifetime of health challenges.

And so this is an issue that we'd like to work on internationally, including here in India. And it is part of a broader set of issues around global health that we need to address. The Prime Minister and I have discussed, for example, how we can do a better job in dealing with issues like pandemic and making sure that we have good alert systems so that if a disease like Ebola or a deadly flu virus or Polio appears, that it's detected quickly and then treated quickly so that it doesn't spread.

And the public health infrastructure around the world needs to be improved. I think the Prime Minister is doing a great job in focusing on these issues here in India, and India has a lot to teach many other countries who may not be advancing as rapidly in improving this public health sector.

But it has an impact on everything because if children are sick, they can't concentrate in school and they fall behind. It has a huge economic impact on the countries involved. And so we think that there's a lot of progress to be made here, and I'm very excited about the possibilities of continuing this work even after I leave office.

[Prime Minister spoke in Hindi, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

Prime Minister Modi. [Inaudible]—has asked a question, and it's quite an interesting question. House has asked me: "There's an old photograph of you as a tourist in front of the White House. So when you went back to America last September, what aspect really touched your heart?"

Well, it's true that when I went to America for the first time I couldn't actually get into the White House, of course. There was a big iron fence outside the White House. And we had a photograph of ourselves clicked standing in front of that fence. And when I became Prime Minister, of course, that photograph has also become quite popular.

But at that time, of course, I never thought that I would have the opportunity of actually going into the White House. But one thing really did touch my heart, and I can never forget it.

Barack gifted me a book, and I think he took a lot of trouble to actually find that book. In 1894, that book became famous. It had to do with Swami Vivekananda, who is one of the people I really deeply regard. There was a world religion conference in Chicago in 1894, and this was a compilation of the proceedings of that conference.

And his gifting me that book was something that really deeply touched me. And it wasn't just that. He had actually opened that book, read through that book, and actually put notes on the pages for me. And very proudly, he said that, I am from Chicago, and that is a city to which Swami Vivekananda had gone. And as I said, that deeply touched me, and I do consider that is something that is my heritage. I never did think that standing in front of the White House, having a photograph taken, and actually going into the White House and being gifted a book of somebody I deeply respect—I mean, you can imagine how deeply that must have touched me.

Barack, there's a question for you now.

[Prime Minister Modi spoke in English as follows.]

Himani from Ludhiana, Punjab. The question is for you.

President Obama's Expectations for Success as a Young Man/Social Mobility in the U.S. and India/Education/Equality of Opportunity

President Obama. Well, the question is, did you both imagine you would reach the positions that you've reached today? And it's interesting, Mr. Prime Minister, you talking about the first time you visited the White House and being outside that iron fence. The same is true for me. When I first went to the White House, I stood outside that same fence and looked in. And I certainly did not imagine that I would ever be visiting there, much less living there.

I think both of us have been blessed with extraordinary opportunity, coming from relatively humble beginnings. And when I think about what's best in America and what's best in India, the notion that a tea seller or somebody who is born to a single mother, like me, could end up leading our countries is an extraordinary example of the opportunities that exist within our countries.

Now, I think part of what motivates both you and I is the belief that there are millions of children out there who have the same potential, but may not have the same education, may not be getting exposed to opportunities in the same way. And so part of our job, part of government's job, is that young people who have talent and who have drive and are willing to work for it are able to succeed.

And that's why emphasizing school, higher education, making sure that children are healthy, and making sure those opportunities are available to children of all backgrounds, girls and boys, people of all religious faiths and all races in the United States is so important, because you never know who might be the next Prime Minister of India or who might be the next President of the United States. They might not always look the part right off the bat, and they might just surprise you if you give them a chance.

[Prime Minister spoke in English as follows.]

Prime Minister Modi. Thank you, Barack.

[Prime Minister spoke in Hindi, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter, as follows.]

This was also addressed to me: "Did you ever think that you would reach the position you have today?"

No, I never imagined that, because, as Barack said, I came from a very humble background. But for a very long time, I remember that I told people that don't ever imagine you're going to become somebody, don't ever dream of becoming somebody. If you have to dream something, then dream of doing something. Because when you do something, you also get satisfaction, and you're inspired to do more. If you only want to become something and then you don't become what you wanted to become, you are disappointed. And that is why I never, ever dreamt of becoming someone.

And even today, I don't dream of becoming somebody, but certainly I do dream of doing things. I do want to serve my country. I want to serve the 1.25 billion people in my country. And I think that there can't be anything more ambitious than that.

There is also a question for Barack.

[Prime Minister spoke in English as follows.]

From Om Prakash. Om Prakash is studying Sanskrit at JNU. He belongs to Jhunjunu, Rajasthan. Om Prakash is a convener of Special Centre for Sanskrit Studies in JNU.

Democracy/Importance of Transparency in Government

President Obama. Well, this is a very interesting question. His question is: "The youth of the new generation is a global citizen. He's not limited by time or boundaries. In such a situation, what should be the approach by our leadership, governments, as well as societies at large?" And I think this is a very important question.

When I look at this generation that's coming up, they're exposed to the world in ways that you and I could hardly imagine. They have the world at their fingertips, literally. They can, using their mobile phone, get information and images from all around the world. And that's extraordinarily powerful. And what that means, I think is, is that governments and leaders cannot simply try to govern or rule by a top-down strategy, but rather, have to reach out to people in an inclusive way and an open way and a transparent way and engage in a dialogue with citizens about the direction of their country.

And one of the great things about India and the United States is, we're both open societies, and we have confidence and faith that when citizens have information and there's a vigorous debate, that over time, even though sometimes, democracy is frustrating, the best decisions and the most stable societies emerge, and the most prosperous societies emerge, and new ideas are constantly being exchanged. And technology today, I think, facilitates that not just within countries, but across countries.

And so I have much greater faith in India and the United States, countries that are open-information societies, in being able to succeed and thrive in this new information age than closed societies that try to control the information that citizens receive. Because ultimately, that's not—no longer possible. Information will flow inevitably one way or the other. And we want to make sure that we're fostering a healthy debate and a good conversation between all peoples.

[Prime Minister Modi spoke in Hindi, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

Prime Minister Modi. That was addressed to Barack. It is a question that is also addressed to me. And I think that the answer that Barack has given is very good, is very inspirational. What I would like to say is that people influenced by a communist viewpoint used to call for communism across the world. They used to say, "Workers of the world unite," the workers of the world should become one. That was a slogan that we've heard for decades.

I do believe that the youth today have strength. They are able to reach out and looking at that strength, I think we should say that the youth unite the world. We need to change our slogan. The youth of today must bring the world together. I do believe that youth today have the strength and they can do it.

The next question is from a chartered accountant from Bombay. He's asked me this question. He's asked me: "Which American leader has inspired you?"

When we were small, we used to look at Kennedy's photographs in the newspapers, and we thought his personality was really impressive. But the question is, who inspired me?

I had a great interest for reading when I was young, and I did read Benjamin Franklin's autobiography. He lived to a ripe old age, and he never did become President of the United States. But his life is really inspirational: how one person can manage to change his life; how he can make those attempts intelligently; how he can deliberately seek to reduce the number of hours that he needs to sleep, how to reduce the amount of food, the kind of hunger, that he feels; and how to influence people who are angry with him, how to find solutions to that.

There are very, very small issues that he has addressed in his biography. And I always tell everyone that we need to read about Benjamin Franklin's life. He's an inspiration to me, even today. He was a multifaceted personality. He was a political scientist. He was a thinker. He was a social worker. And he came from a very humble background. He wasn't able to complete his schooling, but he has had a profound influence on American life and thought, even today. And I really found his life to be truly inspirational, and I would like to motivate you to read about his life.

And if you want to learn how to transform your life, you would be able to learn it from there. There are small examples that he gives that can serve as an example to you. And I do believe that you would find this an inspiration as well.

There is a question from Monika to Barack. Barack, this question is addressed to you.

President Obama's Sources of Inspiration/Importance of Public Service

President Obama. Well, the question is: "As leaders of two major economies, what inspires you and makes you smile after a bad day at work?" And that's a very good question.

I say sometimes that the only problems that come to my desk are the ones that nobody else solves. If they were easy questions, then somebody else would have solved them before they reached me. So there are days when it's tough and frustrating. And that's true in foreign affairs, that's true in domestic affairs.

But I tell you what inspires me—and I don't know, Mr. Prime Minister, if you share this view. Almost every day, I meet somebody who tells me, you made a difference in my life. So they'll say, the health care law that you passed saved my child who didn't have health insurance, and they were able to get an examination from a physician, and they caught an early tumor, and now he's doing fine. Or they'll say, you helped me save my home during the

economic crisis. Or they'll say, I couldn't afford college, and the program you set has allowed me to go to the university.

And sometimes, they're thanking you for things that you did 4 or 5 years ago. Sometimes, they're thanking you for things you don't even remember or you're not thinking about that day. But it's a reminder of what you said earlier, which is, if you focus on getting things done as opposed to just occupying an office or maintaining power, then the satisfaction that you get is unmatched.

And the good thing about service is, is that anybody can do it. If you're helping somebody else, the satisfaction that you can get from that, I think, exceeds anything else that you can do. And that's usually what makes me inspired to do more and helps get through the challenges and difficulties that we all have, because obviously, we're not the only people with bad days at work. I think everybody knows what it's like to have a bad day at work. You just have to keep on working through it. Eventually, you'll make a difference.

[Prime Minister Modi spoke in Hindi, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

Prime Minister Modi. Barack has really spoken from the heart. Because no matter what office we hold, we are all individuals, we are all human beings first. And listening to this, I also feel like recounting an episode from my life.

For many years, I was working, I was single, and I was occupied with my work. And a lot of people at that time used to give me food to eat. And there was one family that used to invite me very often, but I never went to their house because I felt they were very poor, and I thought if I go to their house and have dinner, then it will be a burden on them. But one day, because they were so affectionate and kept inviting me, I did bow to their wishes and visited them.

They had a very small hut. There was a very small place to sit there. They gave me something to eat, which was a piece of bread and some milk. And they had a small child who was looking at that milk, was just staring at it. And it looked as if the child had never even seen milk. So I quickly gave that glass of milk to the child, and immediately, within seconds, he just drank up that milk. His own parents were quite angry with him because he had had my milk, but I experienced at that point that perhaps that child had never had any milk besides his mother's milk. And they had wanted to feed me well, and that's why they had gone and got milk.

And it really touched me that somebody living in a poor hut, a poor family would go through that kind of trouble to feed me. And you need to actually dedicate your life to serving these people, and that is something that inspires me.

As Barack has said, what common people feel is something that we've experienced. And I'm very grateful that Barack has taken the time out today to join us, to speak to us. I'm also very grateful to the people of this country, because I know that people in every town, in every city, in every street are listening to this program. And we hope that this program, that the voice that we are spreading will be with you always.

And I do have an appeal. I have a suggestion. We are going to take out an e-book of this conversation between Barack and me today. We want to bring out an e-book of this conversation. And I would like to ask those listeners who have been listening in on this program today to participate. The best hundred suggestions that we get will be included in this

e-book that we plan to bring out. So whether it's on Twitter, Facebook, or any other online medium, use hashtag #YesWeCan. Write to us using this hashtag #YesWeCan. The issue——

[Prime Minister Modi spoke in English as follows.]

Eliminate poverty, hashtag #YesWeCan. Quality health care to all, hashtag #YesWeCan. Youth empowered with education, hashtag #YesWeCan. Jobs for all, hashtag #YesWeCan. Global peace and progress, hashtag #YesWeCan.

[Prime Minister Modi continued in Hindi, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

I want that you join this movement, that you write in with this hashtag. Give us your thoughts, give us your ideas. We will select the best hundred ideas. And the conversation that we've had today, Barack and me, we will be taking up these ideas, including them in that e-book. And we hope that this will become everyone's thoughts, the heart-to-heart thoughts of everyone.

I'm, again, very grateful to Barack for being here. And on the auspicious occasion of Republic Day on the 26th of January, I am very happy, and I'm very proud that he's with us today. Thank you.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 5:37 p.m. on January 25 in the Billiard Room at Hyderabad House. It was broadcast at 8 p.m. on January 27 as a special episode of Prime Minister Modi's monthly radio program, "Mann Ki Baat." In the address, Prime Minister Modi referred to Melinda French Gates and William H. Gates III, cochairs, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 27. Audio of the translation of Prime Minister Modi's remarks was not available for verification of the content of his remarks.

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