

Remarks at a State Dinner Honoring Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India
June 22, 2023

President Biden. Welcome to Prime Minister Modi's Washington home. [Laughter]

I've been doing this—please have a seat. I've been doing this a long time, but I don't ever remember anybody getting a warmer welcome—[laughter]—than this man right here.

Prime Minister Modi. Thank you.

President Biden. Good evening, everybody.

Twenty years ago, as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I made clear that the United States and India grew to be the closest friends and partners in the world, the world would be a safer place. I believe that even more today now that I'm President.

Mr. Prime Minister, Jill and I have had a wonderful time with you today during your truly productive visit. And tonight it's fitting—a fitting way to celebrate the great bonds of friendship between India and the United States that will long endure.

As many of you know, these bonds stretch back to America's earliest days. In 1792, our first President, George Washington, established one of the first consulates in Kolkata, nestled along the Bay of Bengal, a hub of commerce and culture, home to more Nobel laureates, I might note, than any other Indian city, including the great poet-philosopher Tagore. And he wrote two national anthems, India and Bangladesh, and influenced great American thinkers as well.

Over a hundred years ago, Tagore sent his son to a college here in America. During his visit here, he traveled the country. And of the wisdom, he said—and he wrote in his life, "In the bustle of all our work, there comes this cry: Take me across and where the mind is without fear, where the mind is led forward to ever-widening thought and actions into that heaven of freedom," end of quote.

As two great democracies in the bustle of our work, India and the United States hear the cry and the call of destiny to take our nations in the world forward to a future worthy of our dreams—a future of greater prosperity, opportunity, liberty, equality for all, and for the good of the world. Because it's only when every person can grasp their fullest potential that we as nations can achieve our highest purpose.

And may we always remember that it's our people—our people—that give our partnership strength. From all the backgrounds and beliefs, they inspire us, challenge us, tell us the truth, and push us forward. They're the reason our democracies endure, evolve, reflect, and renew, generation after generation.

I've seen in my visits to India, and I see in the diaspora here in America—in the arts, education; in the media, law, medicine, and science, and business—businesses of every size; in spelling bee champions—[laughter]—even in cricket clubs across the country, including back in my home State of Delaware; and a record number of Indian Americans in Congress, who are here tonight—Ro, Ami, Raja, Shri, Pramila, and you know—well, I won't go on. [Laughter]

I have a great working relationship with all of you. In fact, after her critical leadership on one of the legislative victories, I called Congresswoman Jayapal's mother in India to thank her and wishing her happy Diwali. It was an incredible moment. I think she wondered, "Who in God's name is calling me?" [Laughter]

As I said this morning, we see the pride of the community in our incredible Vice President. Thank you, Kamala. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Mr. Prime Minister—oh, I better get that translated.

[At this point, President Biden paused while his remarks were translated into Hindi by an interpreter. He then continued his remarks as follows.]

Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for your partnership and your friendship. And to all—to all—please join me in a toast, but I don't know if we have any glasses. *[Laughter]* Please join me in a toast. Here it comes. The good news for both of us: Neither of us drink. *[Laughter]*

[A White House aide handed glasses to President Biden and Prime Minister Modi. President Biden briefly addressed the aide as follows.]

That is what? Ginger ale? Okay. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Prime Minister, I had an Irish grandfather named Ambrose Finnegan. And he used to say that when you give a toast and you don't have any alcohol in your glass, you must do it with your left hand. *[Laughter]* You think I'm kidding? I'm not. *[Laughter]*

[An interpreter began to translate President Biden's remarks into Hindi.]

President Biden. That wasn't in the script. *[Laughter]*

[The interpreter continued the translation, and President Biden then continued his remarks as follows.]

A toast to our partnership, to our people, to the possibilities that lie ahead, to two great friends, two great nations, and two great powers. Cheers.

[President Biden offered a toast.]

The floor is yours.

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

Prime Minister Modi. President Biden, First Lady Dr. Jill Biden, distinguished guests: Good evening.

First of all, I thank President Biden for this wonderful dinner today. My special thanks to Dr. Jill Biden for her personal efforts and attention in making my visit a success. I would also like to express my gratitude to her for the magnificent organization of today's event.

Yesterday evening, you opened the doors of your house to me. I'm deeply grateful to you for this special gesture, for your friendship and warm hospitality.

I know your hospitality has moved your guests to sing. I wish I too had the singing talent. *[Laughter]* I would have also sung before you all. *[Laughter]*

Mr. President, this evening is made special by the presence of the people of our two countries, bringing the values of democracy and diversity to life. They are our most precious assets.

When we met in Japan for the Quad Summit, you mentioned a problem that you were facing. Well, looking at the vast experience of your long public life, I'm sure that you must have resolved the problem. I hope you were able to fit in everyone who wanted to come to dinner tonight.

[Laughter]

You gathered a group of exceptionally talented and remarkable people tonight. I must commend you for that. All these people symbolize so much about the India-U.S. relations: our energy, our dynamism, and our potential.

Indian Americans have come a long way in the U.S. They are proud of India's values, democratic traditions, and culture and have always found a respectful place in America's melting pot. Indian Americans have played a significant role in further strengthening the inclusive society and economy of the U.S.

Be it hospitals or hotels, universities or research labs, gas stations or logistics, management or IT, they are making their mark everywhere. *[Laughter]* And now some of them are even in the White House. *[Laughter]*

With every passing day, Indians and Americans are getting to know each other better. We can pronounce each other's names correctly. We can understand each other's accent better. Kids in India become Spider-Man on Halloween. *[Laughter]* And America's youth is dancing to the tune of "Naatu Naatu." *[Laughter]*

Amidst the love for baseball, cricket is also getting popular in the U.S. The American team is trying its best to qualify for the Cricket World Cup to be held in India later this year. I wish them good luck and success. *[Laughter]*

Mr. President, for over five decades, through all the sweeping changes in the world, you've worked hard in the service of your nation and the entire humanity. You've turned every adversity into strength, loss into resolve, challenge into a mission.

I first met you nearly a decade ago when you were the Vice President, and I see the same commitment and intensity even today in you. You are soft spoken, but when it comes to action, you are very strong.

And I know that as an educationist, Dr. Jill Biden has made a tremendous contribution in this journey.

Friends, President Biden and I had some very wide ranging and deep conversations today. I think our teams got tired of taking notes. *[Laughter]* And yet it felt like we were running out of time. I don't want to speak too much about India-U.S. relations, because I know this is my fifth speech for the day, or maybe it's the sixth. As you can see, I really have lost count. *[Laughter]*

Mr. President, in 2014, when you had hosted a banquet for me, at that time I was observing a 9-day religious fast. And I remember you were asking me and asking me again and again what I could eat during my fast. *[Laughter]* But it was not possible for me to eat anything, and you were quite concerned about it. Well, today I'm making up for it. All that you desired at that time with so much affection is being fulfilled today. *[Laughter]*

I know everybody is eager to have dinner, looking at today's special menu. I know the effort made by Dr. Biden in very delicately curating today's menu. But there's one more thing left to do. Please join me in raising a toast.

[Prime Minister Modi spoke in English as follows.]

A toast to our wonderful host, President Biden and Dr. Jill Biden. A toast to good health, prosperity, and the pursuit of happiness. To liberty, equality, and fraternity. And to the everlasting bonds of friendship between India and the United States.

Cheers.

President Biden. Cheers.

[Prime Minister Modi offered a toast.]

Prime Minister Modi. Thank you.

President Biden. Enjoy your meal.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:27 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Reps. Rohit Khanna, Amerish B. Bera, S. Raja Krishnamoorthi, and Shri Thanedar; and Maya Jayapal, mother of Rep. Pramila Jayapal. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 23.

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