

**Speech of Ms Teresa Cheng, SC
Secretary for Justice
National Day Reception of India
24 January 2020 (Thursday)**

Consul General (Mrs. Priyanka Chauhan [*pronunciation: chow-han*]), ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. It is my pleasure to be here tonight to celebrate the National Day of India. On behalf of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), may I extend to you, Consul General, and the people of India, our warmest congratulations on the your Republic Day.

Business ties between India and Hong Kong

2. With a population of more than 1.3 billion people, India today is one of the world's largest economies. Thanks

to the Indian Government's laudable efforts in fueling its economic growth, India has been crowned the fastest growing economy in the past decade. Remarkably, India has climbed 67 places in 5 years' time from 130th to 63rd in the latest World Bank's Ease of Doing Business ranking. Benefiting from this, in the past 5 years, the bilateral trade between India and Hong Kong grew, on average, by 4.5 per cent per year. Our bilateral trade amounted to US\$28.9 billion in 2018 and is expected to be on the rise.

3. These figures made India our 7th largest trading partner in 2018, while Hong Kong was India's 5th largest trading partner. The proximate trade ties between India and Hong Kong across ranges of sectors such as finance, maritime and logistics are reflective of Hong Kong's keen interest in India's economic growth.

Closer bonds between India and China

4. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and China. Last October, our President Xi and your Prime Minister Modi announced the establishment of a high-level economic and trade dialogue mechanism to enhance trade and commercial relations between the two nations.

5. To take the bilateral relations to greater heights, the two leaders also designated this year as the “Year of India-China Cultural and People to People Exchanges”. A series of 70 celebratory activities in India and China will be organised to mark this special anniversary year, including a China-India Youth Dialogue and projects to study the historic maritime links between the two civilizations.

Further co-operation between India and Hong Kong

6. As a premier international financial centre occupying a strategic location in the Asia-Pacific region, Hong Kong plays an unrivalled role as the prime gateway to the massive Mainland market. Over 12% of the total trade between India and the Mainland was routed through Hong Kong in 2018. This underlines Hong Kong's growing and unique role, under the innovative "one country, two systems" policy, to act as a dynamic connector between the Mainland and the rest of the world.

7. Equipped with a wide array of institutional strengths, including world-class professional services and extensive global networks, Hong Kong has a lot to offer to the Indian community. Specifically, with our sound foundation of the rule of law and robust legal fraternity, our city is an ideal hub

for deal-making and dispute resolution services to our Indian partners. To the benefit of Hong Kong's uniqueness under the "One Country Two Systems", a major relevant breakthrough last year is the ground-breaking arrangement between Hong Kong and the Mainland on the Court-ordered interim measures in aid of arbitral proceedings. This arrangement has made Hong Kong the first and only jurisdiction outside Mainland China where, as a seat of arbitration, parties to arbitral proceedings administered by eligible arbitral institutions can apply to the Mainland courts for interim measures, and thereby enhanced the attractiveness of Hong Kong as a seat of arbitration for Mainland-related disputes.

8. We look forward also to partnering with the Indian communities to tap the boundless business opportunities in

the region, particularly those brought about by the development of the Greater Bay Area in our country.

9. Business aside, I am delighted to learn that our people-to-people ties continue to expand as well. Thanks to the support of the Indian Consul General, the 11th Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum organised by our Government was successfully held last month, which has facilitated closer cultural cooperation exchanges among Asian countries, including India. Moreover, we have a solid foundation for legal cooperation underpinned by two agreements on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters and surrender of fugitive offenders which came into operation respectively in 2011 and 1997. The two agreements work hand in hand in our cooperation to combat serious crimes. In the past 5 years, India has made 103 requests on mutual legal assistance and 5 requests on surrender of fugitive offenders to Hong Kong,

including one on-going case. We look forward to continuing the effective cooperation in the areas between our two governments.

Conclusion

10. Ladies and gentlemen, notwithstanding the unprecedented challenges in the recent months, Hong Kong's strengths and resilience have not been undermined. As a new year come with new hopes and plans, the HKSAR Government has rolled out and will continue to take on new initiatives to improve livelihood of different walks of lives and foster an inclusive and sustainable society in tandem with the national and international developments. Through it all, with the continuing support of all in Hong Kong including our friends in the Indian community, I am confident that we will together witness the continuing prosperity of this lively

city and its growth to another height.

11. It is indeed so apt for us to gather on this evening of the Chinese New Year's Eve for a reunion between Hong Kong and India as one big family. I wish you and your loved ones blessed with happiness, harmony and prosperity in the year ahead. May I now propose a toast: "To the people of India on its 71st Republic Day." Cheers.

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