

Address of Ambassador Guðni Bragason at a reception for the members of the Indo Icelandic Business Association on 15th March 2022.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome you all to this reception which is held in cooperation with the Chairman of the Indo Icelandic Business Association, Prasoon Dewan. It is an honor for me to receive the members of the association and spouses to my residence.

This is also an occasion for us to say goodbye to the Deputy Chief of Mission, Sigþór Hilmisson. He will return to his Director's post in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs where he will be instrumental in organizing the move of the Ministry to new headquarters. I must say that I do not envy him of this task but it is very exciting for us to move to the new building which is located next door to the cultural centre Harpa, home of the symphony orchestra.

I also like to welcome his successor as Deputy Chief of Mission, Mrs Kristín Anna Tryggvadóttir. She has served in our Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York and in the Embassy of Iceland in Ottawa, Canada.

Since we all met last time, the mandate of the Icelandic Government has been renewed. The Government has put sustainability and innovation in the centre of its policies, as outlined in the Policy Platform. We promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), support democracy and human rights. These policies correspond well with the policies of the Government of India. Our two countries are ideal partners, despite the difference in size and population.

The Sustainable Development Goals give us guidance in our work. We welcome the emphasis of the Indian Government on renewable energy and the aims to promote green energy and better quality of life for future generations.

Both our countries have innovative policies, we enjoy strong technical infrastructure, education system, research and development institutions, and first and foremost people with new ideas.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Business Iceland agency go hand in hand in promoting innovation and green solutions. We engage in foreign trade under the banner of **Green by Iceland**, the motto of our export policies which is reflected in the six areas of emphasis: Geothermal cooperation, innovation and new technology, creative arts and culture, tourism and travel, fisheries and specialized products and nature products.

Allow me to mention that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has set up funding mechanisms to support small companies with grants in projects that fall under the umbrella of the Sustainable Development Goals. An Icelandic-Indian geothermal project benefitted from such a grant last year and recently an innovative company in health care received such a grant.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Iceland is a staunch advocate of free trade which is the foundation of prosperity in our country. Through the membership of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and bilaterally, Iceland has made free trade agreements with 75 countries. Free trade negotiations have been conducted between the EFTA-countries and India for almost ten years and we hope that an agreement will be concluded as soon as possible.

Our countries, and indeed the whole world, have been facing enormous challenges in the last two years through the COVID-19 pandemic. And now the brutal invasion of the Ukraine is threatening political and economic stability worldwide, as well as what we stand for: Security, democracy and human rights, free elections, sustainable use of natural resources, free market economy and rules-based international order.

Allow me to quote our new Foreign Minister, Þórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir at a meeting in the OSCE in Vienna last month where she said:

“Iceland reiterates its unwavering support of the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We stand with the people of Ukraine. Russia must pay a heavy economic and political price for its actions. Iceland is firmly united with our friends and allies in this regard.”

Thank you.