**Remarks by Ambassador Sibi George**

**at the Kalamela by KELI at Zurich on May 20, 2018**

**Good Evening Everybody, President of Keli, General Secretary, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Young Children,**

**Let me begin by congratulating KELI team for their efforts in putting together a wonderful Kalamela in Zurich. The dedication with which you have organized this event shows your commitment to promote Indian culture in Switzerland.**

**I thank the KELI team for inviting me and my family to this evening today. On behalf of the Government of India and the Embassy of India I place on record my sincere appreciation to the KELI leadership in organizing this event.**

**In KELI we see a partner contributing immensely for promoting Indian culture and tradition in Switzerland and beyond. In KELI we see a group of dedicated men and women and families working hard to inculcate in our children our rich and varied culture.**

**I congratulate the children who spent several hours in learning various art forms and performing them today. I have not been personally present here yesterday and today morning. But thanks to Shri Agustine Paranikulangara who has been sending me clips of the various events here. Thank you Shri Augustine. I congratulate the parents here, who have found time and resources in making their children learn these art forms. It is not easy.**

**Like many of you I have been a wandering soul. Travelling almost every three years from one country to another, making new friends, meeting new colleagues and learning new cultures and traditions. For my wife Joice and for me it has been a mammoth exercise to try and bring up our children in our great culture.**

**I recall a speech that I wrote for my children when my eldest child was five year or so.**

**Think about a nation that prides itself in having nature’s bounty, the earliest civilization, a rich and varied cultural heritage and a glorious past. That is my great India.**

**Today, we are a melting pot of the world’s finest cultures, philosophies, sciences, arts and skills.**

**We all come from different parts of India – North, South, East and West. We speak several hundred languages, we practice different religions, we worship different Gods, we believe in different political ideologies. But these differences are our strength. We are a nation of unity in diversity. There is the feeling of oneness and common consciousness, the Indianness that brings us together and celebrate our great culture here.**

**India has transformed in the last seventy years, both at internally and externally. At the domestic level, India’s transformation has been decisive. A poverty stricken population with a literacy rate of a mere 12% in 1947 today has a literacy rate of 74%; its average life expectancy in 1947 was 35 years, which now reached over 70 years; from a poor medical infrastructure nation it has grown as one of the major medical tourism destination for the world; from a country which depended on foreign aid for sustenance, India has emerged as world’s 2nd largest producer of rice and wheat, world’s largest producer of Milk and is in top few countries for fruits and vegetables. We made significant progress in agriculture, food production, energy, healthcare, education and various fields of science and technology. We have made our mark in the international arena, in the fields of information technology, mass media and communication, space, defense and nuclear science. We are no more seekers of foreign charity.**

**In the foreign policy front India is a factor to be reckoned with. No one can deny that there has been a steady transformation in India’s profile and role at the global level. India’s robust participation at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos in January 2018 giving the inaugural key-note address, a summit which was attended by over eighty Heads of State/Heads of Government and over 300 CEOs and Business leaders is reflective of India’s transformed profile in 21st century. This year, India set the tone for the deliberations at the Davos meeting.**

**At the bilateral level, we continue to cherish the excellent relationship we have with Switzerland. At the political level, India maintains highest level of engagement with Switzerland. In the last two years, we had three summit level meetings with Presidents of Switzerland. President HE Schneider Ammann hosted him in Switzerland in July 2016, Swiss President Madam HE Doris Leuthard visited India on a State visit in August 2017 and current President HE Alain Berset received Prime Minister in Davos in January 2018. These milestone visits imparted fresh momentum to our deep-rooted and multi-faceted cooperation. Switzerland today is a household name in India. Thanks to the Bollywood which spent considerable time shooting in Switzerland. On the other hand, in Switzerland Yoga and Ayurveda have become household names. Yoga is celebrated in every village and town in Switzerland.**

**Another major development related to India’s Foreign and Domestic policy is that India today is deeply reconnected with its Diaspora. The country has a deeper partnership at people to people level. India is proud of its Diaspora and their achievements. Our government has taken several initiatives for engaging the Diaspora around the world. The objective behind these is to help us stay connected with India and be part of its growth story. Government of India have created a new facility- the Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra - in New Delhi as a one stop resource center for our diaspora. The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is planned in Varanasi in January 2019, which include a visit to Allahabad for the Kumbh Mela and also participation at the Republic Day parade. I urge you to register to attend the event. I can assure you it will be a memorable visit.**

**Everywhere I travelled in Switzerland, I am happy to see the vibrant Indian community contributing to the economy of Switzerland. They include scientists, professors, artists, engineers in key positions. I also see students excelling in their studies in Switzerland. At the same time, we maintain the Indianness among the traditions of they adopted home.**

**This year we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Friendship Treaty that we singed with Switzerland. In this 70th anniversary, our Embassy is planning a series of events including a Festival of India covering several cities of Switzerland.**

**In fact we have a rather ambitious outreach strategy which aims to take us to every Canton, every Commune and covering every major sectors of economy and science and technology in Switzerland. I urge you to participate in the series of events that the Embassy organizes under the banner of Indian Professionals Network and Indian Cultural Network.**

**In June this year alone, we are organising an India Tourism Roadshow in Zurich and Geneva, ‘International Yoga Day’ covering various cities of Switzerland, and an India Ayurveda event again in Zurich.**

**I urge you all to keep connected with Embassy through the website and social media. Please consider Embassy as your partner in all your outreach efforts, however, small or big are your ideas and efforts. I urge you to stay connected to us through Facebook and visiting our website.**

**Once again, I congratulate you for organizing a wonderful Kalamela this year. Thank you.**

*May 20, 2018*

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