

Address of Ambassador Guðni Bragason at a business luncheon in Chennai on 25th November 2021.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a pleasure to be here in Chennai, with its vibrant commercial activities and illustrious history. I like to welcome you to this luncheon and also to thank the I the Consul General of Iceland, Mr Kumar Sitaraman, for organizing our visit to Chennai and for receiving us to kindly. It is for me a great honor and pleasure to serve as Ambassador of my country to the Republic of India. In the coming year, 2022, Iceland and India will celebrate fifty years of diplomatic relations. This anniversary gives a good opportunity to highlight the issues and ideals we have in common, such as emphasis on security, democracy and human rights, sustainable use of natural resources, free market economy, and draw attention, through events and cultural exchange, to our good relations.

The Sustainable Development Goals give us guidance in our work and Iceland is ready to partner with India in this respect. 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. For almost a century we have used geothermal energy in our country, not only to produce electricity for power consuming industries, but also for use in the community, such as heating houses, schools and sports facilities, as well as for preserving food in cooling facilities and thus adding value to food production and strengthening food security and minimizing waste.

Our countries have a long cooperation on oceans issues within the UN and FAO and other international agencies. We share the same goals on sustainability, clean oceans, blue economy and the fight against plastic pollution in the sea. India ratified the Law of the Sea in 1995 and we value the Observer Status of India in the Arctic Council.

We live in a free-market economy and trade, also trade in fish, should adhere to the rule of the market. We have built our fishing sector according to market principles, free of subsidies and with a transferable quota system. This has guaranteed sustainability of the fish stocks around Iceland and made fish products the most important export product.

Iceland is a staunch advocate of free trade which is the foundation of prosperity in our country. Free Trade Agreements open markets for our companies, and vice versa. 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. We urge Indian authorities to reconsider the heavy customs tariffs on seafood.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs supports the work of the Business Iceland agency and more collaboration with the business sector. Together we are focusing on six areas; geothermal

cooperation, innovation and new technology, creative arts and culture, tourism and travel, fisheries and specialized products and nature products. Although the COVID-19 situation has brought to a stand-still some commercial enterprises, we encourage businessmen and women to start planning for the future.

We recognize the need to share know-how and technology. Therefore, the MFA has supported development training programmes, now under the auspices of UNESCO. These are in the field of Fisheries, Geothermal Cooperation and Land Restoration, as well as Gender Equality. In the fishing sector our development cooperation has concentrated on training, from the catch, processing and to marketing, involving health and sanitary aspects, as well as social aspects such as the considerable role of women in the fishing sector.

Several hundreds of experts, also from India, have been invited to come to Iceland to train with these Programmes. The Fisheries Training Programme (UNESCO/GRÓ/FTP) is interested in holding a capacity-building seminars at an Indian Institute/University. Another aspect of this is more commercial, that is the Icelandic Oceans Cluster which needs a strong partner in India and is interested in sharing know-how on the cluster concept. The fishing sector provides us with endless new ideas and innovation, as well as several possibilities for Iceland and India to cooperate on.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Our countries, and indeed the whole world, have been facing enormous challenges in the last months through the COVID-19 pandemic. Allow me though to say that it shows the strength our societies and culture that we have been able to live up to these challenges, and that we will over-come them. It is my intention to do everything in my capacity to strengthen and foster the friendly relations between our countries.

Thank you.