

India full of diversity; it is our pride, our strength: PM Modi

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London: Facing attack back home over the issue of intolerance, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said India's diversity was the country's "strength and pride" and underlined the importance of peaceful co-existence.

Modi also said that there is no reason for India to remain poor, asserting, "We harbor poverty for no reason."

"India is full of diversity. This diversity is our pride and it is our strength. Diversity is the speciality of India." he said, adding that despite the country being home to diverse religions, over 100 languages and 1,500 dialects Indians have proved how to live together.

Modi was addressing thousands of people, almost all of Indian origin, at a Grand Community reception in his honour at the iconic Wembley Stadium, home to rock concerts and England's national soccer team. The event was themed 'Two Great Nations, One Glorious Future'.

Courting the Indian diaspora with rock star-style tour on the second day of his three-day visit to the UK--the first by an Indian Premier in 10 years--, Modi got a rapturous welcome when he reached one of Britain's most famous sporting venues this evening. An estimated 50,000 to 60,000 people were present at the event, according to the organisers.

"Your warm welcome makes me feel home," Modi told the biggest gathering of Indian diaspora he has ever addressed since assuming office in May 2014.

Modi was introduced to the gathering by British Prime Minister David Cameron, whose wife Samantha, draped in a saree, was also present.

Cameron greeted the assembled audience with a "Namaste" which drew loud cheers and followed up with another greeting "'kem cho'(How are you?) Wembley" in Gujarati. He renewed his pitch for India getting a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

"When it comes to UN we know what needs to happen- India with a permanent seat at the UN Security Council," Cameron said.

Britain has a 1.5 million-strong Indian diaspora population. The event was held in a carnival atmosphere following celebrations for Diwali festival.

Performers included Indian-origin pop star Jay Sean, popular Bollywood singer 'Baby Doll' Kanika Kapoor and Alisha Chinai, who belted out her famous 'Made in India' Hindi number of the 90s, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

A dynamic cultural show showcasing dance styles prevailing across India besides a variety of dance mixes with Bollywood songs was on display. The audience also heard classical, folk art and contemporary music performances. There was also a performance by Scottish bagpipers.

Special 'ModiExpress' buses were deployed to transport the attendees from across the UK.

Modi, who acknowledged that terrorism is a challenge to both India and the UK, asserted that the Sufi tradition is the best antidote to terrorism and anybody who understood the message of this tenet would not have picked up the gun.

"Kabir and Rahim have been our inspirations. Sufi tradition is the best antidote to terrorism," he said, adding the two main challenges facing the world today are terrorism and global warming.

Addressing the issue of terrorism, Cameron said this is a threat to the very existence of the two countries and they stand shoulder-to-shoulder to tackle it, reminding the gathering about the Mumbai and London attacks.

Modi said that his experience in the office in 18 months has made it clear to him that there is no reason for India to remain poor.

"There is no reason for India to remain poor, we harbour poverty for no reason. I wonder why we have started pampering poverty" he said, adding that India's demographic profile is predominantly of youth and hence nobody can stall the country's development.

"65 per cent of the population of the country consists of people below 35 years. India is full of youth and a country which has so many youth cannot continue to lag behind. Nobody can halt its march to development," he said.

On Indo-UK relations, Modi said, "Between two vibrant democracies we are celebrating this very special relationships in this very special venue."

"I was told London will be cold but not so cold. Your warm welcome makes me feel at home. I am grateful to PM Cameron for his kind words," Modi said.

"I want to thank PM Cameron and acknowledge the affection he has towards India," he added.

Modi told the gathering that newspaper and TV headlines are not the barometer to assess a country, a veiled reference to a number of reports in the British media today that were critical of his past and his record on human rights besides bringing up the issue of perceived intolerance in India.

"India is not only that much what is seen in newspapers. India is much bigger. India with its 125 crore people is much bigger and better with a preeminent position beyond the screen of Television," he said.

Referring to his meeting with leaders of the Sikh community, Modi said, "We shared our thoughts on various subjects. I understand their pain on some issues as well."

Modi said the two dreams India were working towards was a clean India and India with 24/7 electricity. "18,000 villages in India need electricity. In next 1,000 days we will ensure they get it."

"The pace and direction of progress in India is such that the fruits of development will be seen very soon," he said.

"World is seeing India as a land of many opportunities," he added.

The Prime Minister announced a direct Air India flight between Ahmedabad and London from December 15.

Â He said this connectivity had been established in 2003 during Vajpayee government but was discontinued later.

"What is the use of taking names as to who did it," he said in apparent dig at the UPA government.

During the course of his 75-minute address, Modi referred to a youth Imran Khan of Alwar in Rajasthan who made 50

mobile applications and dedicated them to the students without charging anything.

"My India resides in people like Imran Khan," he said.

Stating that FDI into India has increased by 40 per cent, Modi said this showed the increasing international confidence in India.

Setting the tone for the global summit on climate change in Paris later this month, Modi said India will take a lead in showing to the world how to deal with the problem. He said he will be hosting a meeting of countries rich in solar energy resources to help tap the renewable energy.

The Prime Minister referred to the defence sector and said efforts were on to ensure that weapons systems including submarines, tanks, planes, warships are made in India which will help the country save millions of dollars.

He said all major global players in defence sector are knocking at India's door expressing keenness to manufacture in India.

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