

**Speech by Ms. K. Nandini Singla, Director General (ICCR)**  
**on the occasion of ICCR's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations**  
**(Azad Bhavan, New Delhi, 9 April 2025)**

Hon. External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar,  
Secretary (CPV) Shri Arun Chatterjee,  
Secretary (East) Shri P. Kumaran  
Deputy Director Generals of ICCR,  
Colleagues from the Ministry of External Affairs,  
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Eminent artists, Educationists, ICCR Scholars and other members of  
ICCR's extended fraternity,  
Friends from the Media,

Distinguished guests,

Namaskar! Good evening and a warm welcome to the 75th anniversary celebration of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) in Azad Bhawan. I thank you all for making time on a busy weekday evening to commemorate ICCR's 75 remarkable years of bridging cultures, fostering friendship and goodwill. I would like to extend a special word of thanks to the Hon'ble External Affairs Minister and Madam Kyoko Jaishanker for honouring ICCR with their presence.

2. I feel deeply humbled to speak here today as the 5 month old Director General of a 75 year old institution that has had an illustrious journey, thanks to the hard work of many before me - ICCR officials, past DGs and Presidents, and many of YOU in the audience. On this momentous occasion, I would therefore like to begin by remembering with enormous gratitude, all those who have contributed to building and bequeathing this wonderful institution to us.

3. To be honest, I myself had only a partial idea of what ICCR does, mostly from the limited perspective of an Indian Embassy abroad, before I joined as DG ICCR. I have now discovered the enormous scope, scale and impact of ICCR's activities in India and abroad (and how much work there is!). I have seen firsthand how it touches the lives of so many people in far corners of the world. For instance, you would be as amazed as I was, to know that more than 7,000 foreign students from 190 countries are studying in India on ICCR scholarships at any given time. Some of them will also display their artistic side today!

4. I was equally amazed to know that ICCR sponsors over 800 Indian artists every year to perform abroad, which averages to more than 2 artists being sent abroad every day! In turn, ICCR also hosts more than 1000 foreign artists every year to perform in India i.e. nearly 3 foreign artists being received in India every day! In fact, each year, on an average, ICCR sends over 100 Indian cultural troupes that perform in over 80 countries.

5. On the academic side, ICCR hosts visits to India by around 50 distinguished foreign academics and leaders every year (almost one per week), and has 53 ICCR India Chairs in foreign universities of 33 countries, teaching various aspects of India to foreign students. 125 eminent foreign Indologists, scholars, artists and ICCR alumni have received various awards from ICCR so far for their contributions to cultural bridge building with India.

6. Again, few would know that more than 152 countries in the world have at least one statue or bust of an Indian leader provided by ICCR that serves as an enduring reminder of India – and that every year, ICCR installs 10 new ones across the world.

7. Today, ICCR runs 38 Indian Cultural Centres across the world where nearly 200 teachers teach Indian dance, music, Yoga and languages to foreigners. What is interesting is that a majority of the teachers are themselves foreigners or members of the Indian diaspora who are truly passionate about Indian culture!

8. What many do know however, is that ICCR anchors large cultural events in India and abroad. For instance, last year, ICCR helped organize 1,121 yoga events across the world during the International Day of Yoga. I had an unforgettable first-hand experience of this recently when I accompanied 120 artists from 11 countries to perform at the incredible Mahakumbh in Prayagraj this February – a first of its kind initiative by ICCR!

9. We have mounted an exhibition in the gallery next door titled 'Padachinnh' which captures some interesting glimpses of ICCR's 75 year journey, including the fact that ICCR has organized over 600 exhibitions since 1961! I invite all of you to please visit it before you leave. You will realize that ICCR's task has not been easy. How do you do justice to projecting the unmatched cultural richness of the most diverse and multilingual country in the world? Especially when its cultural diversity is of continental proportions and defies any generic branding? For instance, how do you capture the idea of an India that speaks thousands of dialects and over a hundred languages? And even publishes newspapers in more than a 100 Indian languages? Has more than 300 dance forms; produces movies in more than 30 languages; and has over a thousand different food varieties? And yet, over the last 75 years, ICCR has endeavoured to do the impossible. It has sought to introduce 'Brand India' to different corners of

the world in all its mind boggling diversity and has been at the forefront of fostering meaningful connections.

10. To do justice to this formidable mandate, ICCR has launched several new initiatives in recent years. It is little known but ICCR which is mandated to promote India's millennia-old culture actually uses state-of-the-art digital technologies and is one of the few fully paperless E offices in the government. For instance, ICCR has fully digitized all its scholarship processes through the Gyan Setu portal and the Admissions to Alumni (A2A) portal; it digitally monitors the activities of all its 38 Indian Cultural Centres through the Activity and Information Management System Portal; it has created a robust digital database of Indian artists of diverse genres through the Artists Management System Portal; it engages its foreign alumni through the India Alumni Portal and conducts online classes in Indian dance, arts and handicrafts for over 4000 foreign students in 51 countries. An interesting fact I was not aware of until recently, was that ICCR signed a MOU and worked with Google to improve Google's AI technology for translation of Sanskrit text to various languages and vice versa, making Sanskrit accessible to the world.

11. ICCR has also launched interesting new visitors programs like the Gen-Next Democracy Network Programme in which 272 young leaders of 77 democracies visited India; the "Knowledge India Visitors Programme" for foreign scholars from 36 countries specializing in Indian studies; the "Buddha Bhoomi Vandana Yatra" which hosted 23 young Buddhist scholars from 11 countries to explore India's rich Buddhist heritage; the Vaishali Festival of Democracy at Nalanda University, the International Conference on "Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam" at the UN General Assembly and the "Hindi Vishwa Yatra" in which 31 foreign students learning Hindi visited India.

12. On the cultural side, ICCR has signed MoUs with 25 Indian states to jointly promote local artists abroad. It also organized a global Indian dance competition for foreign contestants called 'Pratibha Sangam' and launched an e-learning portal on Traditional Indian Knowledge Systems. But what is culture without its flavours – or the amazing diversity of mouth watering Indian dishes that are India's most popular Ambassadors abroad? ICCR has launched the ICCR Annapurna Certificate to recognize Indian restaurants abroad that bring the taste of authentic Indian cuisine to the world. You just saw the second set of certificates being handed over today.

13. Ladies & Gentlemen, ICCR will need to continue to keep pace with a fast changing world through such new initiatives. I am therefore happy to announce 4 new initiatives on the occasion of ICCR's 75th anniversary:

(A) Firstly, to leverage the growing reach of social media through our ICCR foreign scholars who are young Ambassadors of India, ICCR announces two new attractive cash prizes on a quarterly basis:

- the **ICCR Yuva Mitr Prize** to recognize ICCR scholars who actively promote Indian heritage, culture and knowledge systems on global platforms through their social media handles. Through this, we also hope to encourage all our young friends to explore Indian heritage and culture and let the world know about it, especially their friends and families in their own countries.

- the **ICCR Kala Saadhak Prize** to celebrate ICCR scholars who champion India's soft power by personally learning Indian dance, music, art, language etc. ICCR will share their stories with a wider global audience.

- Detailed guidelines for both Prizes, including eligibility criteria, submission and evaluation process, jury composition, Terms and Conditions etc. will be uploaded on ICCR's website and social media.

(B) Today, ICCR will also launch 2 new series on its website, social media handles and newsletter:

**-ICCR ki Khoj:** A series that will showcase unsung champions of Indian culture who are promoting Indian traditions anonymously on their own, in order to recognize their efforts and encourage others. We will begin the series with a numismatist who has a large collection of foreign postal stamps and coins with Indian Gods and Goddesses. Here's a glimpse! (video plays)

-ICCR is also launching the **Padma Awardee Series** to pay tribute to masters of Indian art whose rhythms, brushstrokes, and poetic verses have shaped the nation's cultural consciousness and taken it to the world. We will reach out to these renowned artists and showcase their artistic achievements on a voluntary basis. Here's a glimpse of the first in the series on Smt. Soma Ghosh. (video plays)

(C) Even as modernity reshapes the world, the echoes of India's folk traditions remain timeless. To ensure that these voices are heard beyond India's borders, ICCR will empanel three folk artist groups from each of the 25 states with whom it has signed MOUs and offer a total of 75 folk art troupes from across India, a global stage.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. Looking ahead, as the world becomes more interconnected and homogenous, culture will increasingly define the soul of a people and a nation, and what makes them unique. As ICCR moves towards its 100th

year Amrit Kaal journey alongside an India that strides confidently towards Viksit Bharat and grows in profile on the global stage, the world will become more open and curious about Indian culture. Even as India confidently reclaims its cultural heritage, ICCR will need to do more, and do better, by being more ambitious and constantly adapting itself to changing needs and trends. In this, we will have to deftly navigate a rapidly changing and challenging landscape. For instance, in the era of increasingly short attention spans and 'instant cultural consumption' on social media through 30 second reels, how do we showcase the complexity and layered nuances of art and culture? With such personalised consumption of cultural content and a rapidly growing creative economy that will face the daunting challenge of protecting copyrights and distinguishing between what is real and fake in the age of Artificial Intelligence, it will be imperative for ICCR to work collaboratively with a range of government and non-government partners, creative sector professionals, enterprises and NGOs.

15. In today's world where national identities and interests are becoming paramount, our shared humanity expressed through the universal language of emotions in art and culture, remains our hope. In this, India's contribution would be significant, given India's unparalleled depth and diversity of culture rooted in our millennia old civilisational values of peace, harmony and universal wellbeing. They are not mere concepts to us; they are living values that guide our governance and foreign policy and have been translated into practical foreign policy initiatives like *Vaccine Maitri*, *Vishwa Bandhu Bharat* and *Voice of the Global South*. This genuine embrace of the world, anchored in the belief that we are all in it together, is a message from India that will always be timeless and relevant - especially in this time of dichotomy when people are more isolated than ever in a world that is more closely connected than ever; when inner dis-'ease' and stress are

rising despite rising ease of living and material comfort. The growing global popularity of Indian spiritual traditions and holistic practices like Yoga, Ayurveda and meditation attest to this need. We owe it not only to India but to global wellbeing to propagate this 'Brand India' - a brand that goes beyond the traditional definition of culture to encompass the idea of Bharat as a civilisation that includes our values like dialogue, diversity and democracy; 'sarvodaya' or empowering the marginalised; respect for nature and our eco-friendly spirit of 'jugaad'; reverence for the feminine power of 'Shakti', our exploration of the inner world through spirituality and the outer world through ancient maritime trade, contemporary immigration and futuristic forays into space. It is this 'Brand India' whose story needs to be told to the wider world for the wellbeing of all, for '*sarvejana sukhino bhavantu*'.

16. ICCR will endeavour to lead this narrative in the coming days where the rise of India is acknowledged by the world as a benevolent force for peace, harmony and wellbeing of all. I thank the Ministry of External Affairs, our Embassies and Cultural Centres abroad, our partner countries, and all those who have collaborated in ICCR's 75 year journey for their valued support and look forward to even closer engagement in the exciting days ahead. On this momentous occasion of ICCR's 75th anniversary, ICCR reaffirms its unwavering commitment to strengthening cultural bridges that connect India to the world across nations and generations, helping foster global peace and friendship in line with India's civilisational belief that the world is ultimately one family.

I will end with a line from the Atharva Veda that encapsulates this spirit:

*Sārvā āśa mām mitram Bhavantu*

सभी दिशाओं में मेरे मित्र बन जाए ।



'May we make friends in all directions!'

Thank you.

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