

Acceptance speech by Wahid Saleh, on the occasion of the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman awards, 2011

Your Excellency, President Mrs. Patil
Hon'able Chief Guest Sir Anand Satyanand
Hon'able Ministers on the dias,
Fellow awardees,
Distinguished guests.

Your Excellency, President Patil, I bring to you warm greetings from the Netherlands. I also bring warm greetings from the 160.000 strong Indian Diaspora Community in the Netherlands; the second largest population of people of Indian origin in Europe. It is an honour and a privilege to speak here on behalf of my fellow awardees. We are humbled and deeply honoured by the decision of the government of India to confer this award upon us.

We the awardees coming from different parts of the globe have different backgrounds but the desire of serving the community and the motherland runs through our veins. We thank you and the Indian government for the recognition given to the awardees for their services. In each of the societies we belong to, we have contributed to the welfare and development of our own communities and our fellow citizens from other communities.

I would also like to express our deep felt thanks to the Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs, Mr. Vaylar Ravi and his dedicated team which has worked hard to bring us all together and enabled us to continue to keep in touch with our mother country.

Madam President. We are also deeply honoured this evening that you graced this function and found time to personally give us the award. Our very deep gratitude indeed.

We left India. But India never left us. On behalf of all the awardees, I would like to again express our gratitude and thank the Indian government for their hospitality and generosity. Thank you.

Note:

I received instructions from MOIA that for the "acceptance speech", a time slot of five minutes was planned. Accordingly I prepared a speech.

But on 9th January 2011, just before the start of the function, MOIA officials gave me the text of a speech prepared by the government and requested me to read the same. I was further informed that I shall get only two minutes for the speech and not five minutes.

I was dumbfounded to receive this request. After quickly going through the text of the speech prepared by the MOIA, I decided to stick to the speech prepared by me. To deliver it within a two minutes time frame I had to eliminate most of the text.

I would like to thank fellow awardee from Malaysia Tan Sri Dato' Ajit Singh for his valuable contribution in finalising the text of the speech. We drafted it in between the speeches of other dignitaries.