

**Address of Ambassador Guðni Bragason at the opening of the Icelandic Film Festival
at the Tagore National Film Centre in Chennai on 26th November 2021.**

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed an important moment for us at the Embassy of Iceland in Delhi to open this film festival, since this is the first cultural event held by the Embassy and its Indian partners since the pandemic hit the world in the early months of 2020. The city of Chennai is a proper venue to start anew, with its active modern cultural life and illustrious history.

I like to thank all those who have contributed to this event, first and foremost Mr Tangeraj, General Secretary of the Indo Cine Appreciation Foundation, with whom the Embassy has worked for many years, as well as the Consul General of Iceland, Mr Kumar Sitaraman. They have been generous supporters of the presentation of Icelandic culture in Chennai.

I often like to point out that the three pillars of our Foreign Policy is to promote presentation of Icelandic culture abroad, along with political cooperation and commercial relations. This is stipulated in the Laws on the Foreign Service.

I am impressed how much has been achieved in the last years by our predecessors in Indo-Icelandic cultural relations. Icelanders have participated in literature festivals, film festivals, such as here in Chennai, design fairs, art exhibition and other cultural exchange.

I also like to recall that during the visit of the President of India to Iceland in 2019 a Cultural Exchange Programme for the years 2019 until 2022 was signed on 10th September by the Icelandic Minister of Culture, Mrs Lilja Alferðsdóttir, and Mr Anumula Gitesh Sarma, Secretary in the Ministry for External Affairs, based on the formal Cultural Agreement from 2005. Since the pandemic has put most cultural activities to a standstill since, we have more reason than ever to start again and make use of the provisions of the Cultural Programme, and lay the groundwork for the next period.

We also have a Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Iceland and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) that has played an important role in the relationship with other countries since its foundation in 1950 through generous grants and support. I remember that the first book on India I read as a young student was a by an Icelandic author, Sigurður A. Magnússon, who travelled through India in the 1960s on a grant from the ICCR.

The present MoU provides for an Indian Professor from the University of Allahabad to teach Hindi at the University of Iceland, as well as give courses in modern Indian studies. It is my ambition that an Icelandic professor teaching Icelandic language and literature will soon be engaged at an Indian University.

Iceland also participates in the so-called Nordic Centre in India (NCI) which is a consortium of leading universities and research institutions in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, established in 2001 with the objective to facilitate cooperation in research and higher education between the Nordic countries and India.

Ladies and gentlemen.

To conclude, I believe that culture is an important tool in diplomacy and thus the best method to create an understanding between nations. I hope you will enjoy the film Echo by Rúnar Rúnarsson, portraying ordinary people and their lives in the holiday season. It could just as well have happened in India.

Thank you.