

**Address by Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of Iceland, a the public lecture by Meenakashi Lekhi, India's Minister of State for External Affairs and Culture, on "India@75: India's Role in a Changing World".**

**Held in the Aula in the Main Building on Friday 19 August 2022, 10 am**

Your Excellency, Meenakashi Lekhi, India's Minister of State for External Affairs and Culture, Mr. B. Shyam, Ambassador of India to Iceland, other distinguished guests.

Dear guests.

It is my great honour to welcome India's Minister of State for External Affairs and Culture, Meenakshi Lekhi to the University of Iceland Aula to present a lecture entitled *India@75 – India's Role in a Changing World*.

The start of this week, Monday 15 August, marked a major milestone in India's history: the 75th anniversary of independence and the end of British rule in India. India is a vast country, almost 3.3 million square kilometres, making it the seventh biggest country in the world. India is also the second most populous state on the planet, with a current population of around 1.5 billion. If projected trends continue, it will become the most populous country next year or the year after.

Iceland has been an independent state for 104 years. Iceland, however, is only one thirtieth the area of India and one of the world's least populous countries, with fewer than 400,000 inhabitants.

Although in many respects Iceland and India seem to be polar opposites, cooperation between the two countries is built on a solid foundation, with formal diplomatic relations stretching back 50 years. In recent years, the two countries have developed a wide range of cooperative projects in many different areas – in business affairs, science and technology, and language teaching, to name just a few examples.

For many years, the University of Iceland has placed considerable emphasis on strong academic links with India. For example, the University of Iceland has signed cooperative agreements with Indian universities and is a member of the Nordic Centre in India, which was established in 2001 and is an important platform for teaching and research cooperation

between its Nordic members and Indian partner institutions. For several years now, the University of Iceland has been offering Hindi as a subject, and I would like to extend my particular thanks to the Ambassadors of India to Iceland and the Indian government for their unwavering support in making this a reality. Finally, I would like to mention that Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, former President of Iceland, was presented with the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding in 2010 and has used the prize money to provide several Indian university students with Nehru-Grimsson Fellowships to fund one semester of study in the field of glaciology and climate change at the University of Iceland.

Before I give the floor to India's Minister of State for External Affairs and Culture, I would like to say a few words about our distinguished speaker. Her excellency Meenakashi Lekhi worked as a lawyer for many years and was first elected to the Parliament of India in 2014. In the course of her career, she has fought for many social reforms, in particular for the rights of women and children.

Dear guests. It is my great pleasure to welcome now Her Excellency Meenakashi Lekhi.