

The Flag off function of **“Times Passion World Heritage City Photography Trail”** organized by the **Times of India, New Delhi** at **Ahmedabad. (17th March, 2018)**

- It is indeed a matter of great pleasure and privilege for me to address the august gathering at the function organized by the Times of India, new Delhi to flag off the “Times Passion World Heritage City Photography Trail” at Ahmedabad. I congratulate the organizers for holding such an important function which will help showcase the glorious cultural heritage, rich art, customs and traditions of Ahmedabad city.
- Ahmedabad’s walled city, which I often refer to as a ‘living museum’, was inscribed by the UNESCO last year as India’s first World Heritage City. We find an interesting blend of both – which are vital expressions of a culture that has been preserved over six centuries and curated over layers of history right from the Sultanate, down to the Mughals, Marathas, British rule to the modern period today, when Ahmedabad was chosen as among India’s first smart cities. It is this interesting journey that we celebrate today at this second edition of “Times Passion Trail in Gujarat.”
- The monuments of Ahmedabad’s walled city stand not only for their architectural genius but also for cultural synthesis. The grandeur of the structures shines with the rich history of assimilation spanning over six centuries. It has stood for unity with its elegant carvings in its Hindu and Jain temples, as well as standing as one of the finest examples of Indo-Islamic architecture and Hindu –Muslim art. This unique blend of culture in architecture is called the “Gujarat style” by archaeologists and historians. The Roza, a unique Islamic architecture, for instance took the best of diverse

culture by fusing together stylistic influences from Persia with indigenous Hindu and Jain features. Architects from across the globe, including Le Corbusier have marveled at the rozas. Even around the legends surrounding the founding of the city reveal the roots of a unique and abiding syncretism.

- Dwell deeper into the walled city's dense residential areas called "Pols", and it reveals a complex system of open spaces. The openness is a metaphor for all Amdavadi life, which reflects the cultural and religious ethos of residents and revels in simplicity and sharing. There are still many pol houses that have survived and can be seen. The pols these are unique places where men, women from diverse religions – Hindu, Muslim, Christians, Jews, Parsis, Sikhs – share the same communal space. In these pols there are stirring tales from the golden age of pioneers; from their profitable voyages overseas to their efforts in establishing industries and business friendly systems which now power Gujarat, the feted growth engine of India. The most inspiring aspect of the Amdavadi story is that its notable business icons who have been great philanthropists.
- It was this spirit that invited Mahatma Gandhiji to the city to establish his Satyagrah Ashram. The 20th century was bloodied with wars, but India was the only country which won its independence through a non-violent struggle. The contribution of India to the world's consciousness can be credited entirely to Bapu, who nurtured and executed the idea of satyagrah during his stay in Ahmedabad from 1915 to 1930 on his return from South Africa.
- The city pioneered heritage conservation efforts. Over two decades of concerted efforts, it has shown the country a model for preserving their identity and culture.

- I am informed that in the year 2009 during the World Heritage Week, Times of India launched a series of articles as part of a mission titled “Ahmedabad Next: Towards a World Heritage City”. The series celebrated the city’s history. This initiative also drew the support of the Prime Minister of India Shri Narendrabhai Modi Ji who was the Gujarat’s Chief Minister at that time. He suggested that the campaign had the potential to constitute a book and Shri Narendrabhai Modi Ji released the book – "Ahmedabad Next towards a World Heritage City".
- I appreciate the efforts of Times of India for creating awareness about our rich cultural heritage and valued monuments of the city.
- When the UNESCO declared Ahmedabad as India’s first World Heritage City on July 8, 2017 and the third world heritage site in Gujarat after Rani Ki Vav of Patan and Champaner-Pavagadh monuments, it was a triumphant culmination of a city’s effort for global recognition.
- Gujarat is unmatched. Today, it is the growth Centre of the country. Now, Gujarat is witnessing an all-round extensive development. An enterprising spirit is in the blood of people of Gujarat and this is the reason why Gujarat is doing great in every direction and has put its shining mark on the global map.
- Gujarat has taught all of us how to take up hardest challenges and how to face difficult situation and come out with flying colors. The social organizations, philanthropists, entrepreneurs, corporates and people – oriented Government and intellectuals from all walks of life emerge as the assets of the State. They altogether have become the true power source to the State. That true power reflects the concern towards the society to make it better through the intellect that one possesses.

- I congratulate the Times of India Group and the Government of Gujarat for this admirable work in promoting tourism in the State. I am confident that through this unique program, Times Passion Trails, Gujarat Tourism will not only be able to broaden its tourism objectives in reaching out to discerning travelers, both in India and abroad, but also gain a considerable competitive edge in market place.
- As the UNESCO World Heritage Site, I feel Ahmedabad will continue to flourish. Its evolution will embolden other Indian cities to take the path of conservation and development.
- With these words, I conclude my address and thank the organizers for inviting me in such an important function.