

FEBRUARY 29, 1996

*Honourable Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly,*

1. I have great pleasure in welcoming all of you to what is perhaps the last session of the ninth Kerala Legislative Assembly. On this occasion, I look back with pride and satisfaction at the performance of my Government during the last five years and solicit your full hearted co-operation and support to continue this good work.

2. The last five years have been witness to momentous changes not only in our country but also globally. Five years ago, our country was on the verge of economic collapse, with low growth rates, enormous fiscal deficits and galloping inflation rates, and also an alarming balance of payments situation reflected in negligible foreign currency reserves and increasing marginalisation in world trade, when it was becoming apparent that such trade had become the engine of growth everywhere in the world. The down-gradation of India's international credit rating also led to a severe liquidity crisis and there was a real threat that India would default on its external commitments. The bold policy initiatives taken by the Government of India over the last five years in the Industrial and Financial sectors and in the spheres of Trade, Investment, Tax, Exchange Rate policies, and also the debt management of the economy resulted in a sharp reversal in the economic fortunes of the country. Industrial and agricultural growth rates have not only revived, but the former has moved on to a high growth trajectory. With the opening up of the economy, export growth rates have consistently exceeded targets and expectations and foreign investment is rushing in to take advantage of the great economic opportunities that a huge emerging market like India affords. Foreign currency reserves and the balance of payment are at comfortable levels, while the dragon of inflation has been tamed. Economic growth also opens up opportunities for employment, and there is some evidence to show that poverty levels have fallen since the early nineties.

3. Internationally too, there have been momentous changes with the disintegration of Soviet Union and the evaporation of the 'Cold War'. Emergence of a total consensus concept throughout the world seems to sweep for the package of policy measures for growth and development. Our country could not lag behind and the States as the Constituents of the Union had to surge ahead to catch with this. Our State has its own contribution in the socio-economic transformation of our people. Indeed, Kerala's unique pattern of socio-economic development with its focus on Health, Education, Family and Social Welfare, has become a role model for other States, and is standing testimony to the success of a strategy of development based on the exploitation of human resources. The East Asian Miracle has underscored the critical importance of investment in human resources in sustaining high rates of economic growth and development.

4. Thanks to the sustained efforts of my Government the State is now at the threshold of a breakthrough in economic development, and it is now time to capitalise on the momentum attained so far to attract large scale investment in the State. After the declaration of the new Industrial Policy of my Government in the year 1991 there has been a phenomenal expansion of industrialisation in the State. More than sixty three thousand new small scale industrial units have been started after October 1991 till now, involving an investment of 750 crores of rupees and providing employment to more than 270,000 persons. The expansion of industrial infrastructure during the last five years has also been unusually impressive. The Kerala Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (KINFRA) has evolved into a multi faceted body developing industrial infrastructure and promoting infrastructural projects all over the State. I am happy to state that work on the 'Export Promotion Industrial Park' at Kochi, which would give a quantum boost to export oriented industries, has made considerable progress. The 'Apparel Park' at Menamkulam in Thiruvananthapuram District will soon become a reality. My Government have also laid the foundation for large industrial townships and new economic zones in the districts of Palakkad, Kasaragod and Thiruvananthapuram so as to promote large scale industrialisation. For the first time in India a joint venture company called—THE ICICI—KINFRA (IKIN) has been formed which would give a boost to the industrial projects. Again, private sector participation in infrastructural projects has become a reality for the first time in India. The impressive metamorphosis in the industrial environment in the State is best reflected in the performance of the Public Sector Undertakings, with 32 units now reporting profits. In the place of a combined net loss of more than Rupees 150 crores prior to 1991-92, these industries produced a net profit of more than Rs. 16 crores in 1994-95 for the first time in the history of the State.

5. The Khadi, Village and Small Scale Industries Sector have also shown remarkable progress in the State in recent years. My Government reaffirm our commitment to the development of these sectors which generate employment for thousands of people. In the Coir Manufacturing Sector, assistance provided for setting up captive diesel generator sets will surely lead to a tremendous boost in production and profitability.

6. The remarkable increase in employment opportunities in the State achieved by my Government during the last five years may be clearly seen from the sharp decline in the number of unemployed persons registered in the Employment Exchanges. Their number has come down from 42 lakhs to 32 lakhs now, showing that more than 10 lakhs have obtained gainful employment during this period.

7. The agricultural policy adopted in the State has given a new direction and thrust to the Agricultural sector and I am happy to state that this has resulted in a substantial increase in output and productivity. With increased people's participation arising from the transfer of many key programmes to the local bodies, it can be confidently predicted that the sectors of Agriculture, Animal husbandry and Dairy Development are poised for a great leap forward in the near future.

8. My Government have fully exempted paddy cultivators from paying electricity charges for agricultural purposes and has implemented a Crop insurance Scheme for 25 agricultural products for the first time in India. The NABARD-assisted programme for the development of Kule lands will result in a marked rise in agricultural production. A Kuttanad Development Authority will soon be constituted for the integrated development of the Kuttanad area. Innovative schemes for the promotion of coconut oil and other products have resulted in sustained improvement in coconut production as well as in sustaining a reasonably high price level for coconut.

9. There has been remarkable development in the spheres of Animal Husbandry and Dairy Development. I am happy and proud to state that ours is the only State in India now which has veterinary hospital facilities in every panchayat. Livestock development programmes and the creation of infrastructural facilities through livestock co-operatives will be intensified in the coming year, thereby improving the quality of the livestock as well as their production levels. It is expected that additional employment of around half a lakh can be created through diversification of the activities of Dairy Development like indigenous milk production units, dairy extension and quality control.

10. The present power crisis highlights the urgent need for substantial increase in power generation in the State. Indeed, power has perhaps become the chief infrastructural bottleneck for rapid economic growth not only in Kerala, but in the country as a whole. My Government give the highest priority to the generation of power and have come out with a multi pronged strategy to augment power availability. Firstly, intensive efforts are being made to commission the Brahmapuram Diesel Unit and the on-going hydel schemes such as Lower Periyar, Kakkad and Kuttiyadi Extension Projects during the course of the year. On the basis of our persistent efforts the major Kayamkulam power project is also becoming reality. Secondly, an emergency action plan for establishing thermal units with the capacity of 400 MW by the next year has been drawn up. Thirdly, private participation in setting up power projects in the State has been encouraged, and consequently seven major thermal projects for 2900 MW and also 25 mini thermal units are being set up to relieve power scarcity in the State. Fourthly, the power distribution system will also be comprehensively re-vamped to reduce transmission and distribution losses and an "Energy Management Centre" will be set up as a centre of excellence and nodal agency for co-ordinating the efforts of conservation and management of energy in the State.

11. Development of minor and intermediate Ports is an essential infrastructural requirement for economic growth. My Government have already signed Memorandum of Understanding for the development of Vizhinjam and Beypore Ports with private sector participation. New locations with future potential are also being identified and developed with the participation of private industrialists.

12. Tourism has been identified as a thrust area for employment generation and overall development by my Government. Several innovative schemes have been launched and a comprehensive master plan is being prepared with special emphasis on pilgrim tourism at Kalady, Guruvayoor and Sabarimala, where millions of pilgrims congregate every year. Living facilities will be expanded and upgraded at all these places. As part of the development in the "Destination Kerala" programme new tourist facilities are being established at Kadulundy, Malampuzha, Parambikulam, Nelliampathy and Wayanad.

13. I am happy to announce that a tourism circuit connecting Kovalam-Thiruvananthapuram-Kollam-Alappuzha-Kumarakam-Kochi-Munnar and Thekkady has been identified by the Government of India for intensive development and marketing. The tourist towns of Varkala, Kollam, Kumarakam, Alappuzha and Kottayam have been selected for development under the scheme of Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT). In order to tackle the problem of limited accommodation in and around Thiruvananthapuram, my Government propose to embark on a massive tourism development project at Veli-Akkulam with large scale private participation. In line with the special tourism area programme of the Government of India, my Government propose to set up 15 special tourism centres for intensive and planned tourism development, actively involving the private sector.

14. While Kerala has been firmly established on the Tourism Map of the country, my Government are acutely sensitive to the environmental hazards of rapid expansion of this sector. Tourism Development Authorities with statutory powers will be set up in selected areas for ecologically sustainable and environmentally stable tourism development. A "Clean Kovalam Campaign" will be launched during the year with the help of the Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA) to restore the beautiful beaches of Kovalam.

15. A comprehensive project for the development of Thiruvananthapuram and suburban areas as the "State Capital Region" has been taken up by my Government. Construction of new roads and widening of existing ones, expansion of drinking water and sewerage facilities, establishing new growth centres, greening of the city with new parks and gardens and the development of additional tourist facilities in the city are being taken up so as to restore to the capital city its original beauty and grandeur.

16. My Government have always placed emphasis on the timely repair and satisfactory maintenance of major roads in the State. Repair and maintenance of all the roads which had been damaged during the last monsoon were taken up on a war footing and successfully completed. The construction and upgradation of the coastal link road from Thalapadi to Kannur and the hill link road from Peria near Kasaragod to Cherupuzha shall be expedited. Construction of two State Highways, 'Ernakulam-Sabati-mala' and 'Muvattupuzha-Alappuzha' as well as upgradation of 15 existing roads to State Highway standards are being taken up. The Four lane road from Aluva to Cherthala will be completed shortly. You will all be happy to hear that the work on the new legislature complex is also being completed within a few months.

17. Kerala, as the first state in the country to have announced a Water Policy, has taken impressive steps to provide potable water to all citizens. The first phase of the implementation of the Water Policy is expected to be completed during the coming year. The Jaladhara scheme, aimed at participatory water management and the Jalavahini scheme, launched with the aid of the European Economic Community will be continued; and are expected to yield improved results during the coming year. It is expected that 144 Schemes under the Jaladhara Programme will be completed during the year. The hill region water management scheme will be extended to 8 more districts. All districts will also be covered under the drought control programme. Work on 20 Check Dams, which are an effective instrument of water management and conservation, will be started during the next year.

18. A massive programme for the distribution of drinking water to all households during the dry months of March, April and May has been organised on a war footing. Deepening of existing draw wells and the exploitation of water resources through new borewells and filter point tube wells as well as distribution of drinking water through tanker lorries are some of the programmes being urgently taken up.

19. The second phase of the major Muvattupuzha Valley Irrigation Project will be completed before 31st March 1996; and the whole project, which will benefit nearly 40,000 acres of land, will be fully commissioned in the course of the year. The Chimmony Dam Project will also be fully commissioned during 1996-97. Four major irrigation projects namely Pampa, Periyar valley, Kuttiyadi and Chitturpuzha have been completed and work on the Kutiyarkutty-Karappara Project has commenced. Innovative schemes have been proposed under the Command Area Development Programme (CADA) for the diversification of activities. We have also achieved good progress in the field of minor irrigation. Nearly 2000 works have been completed while more than 600 works are now in progress. Numerous works of construction of regulators-cum-Bridges are in various stages of completion, and will be commissioned shortly.

20. Kerala has the unique distinction of becoming the first fully literate State in the Country. Along with the increase in the number of educational institutions, Government intend to ensure quality education by intensive training of teachers in modern instructional techniques, involvement of parents and the local public, proper orientation of students and introduction of academic audit by dedicated professionals.

21. As part of our efforts to improve educational standards, various quality improvement programmes have been introduced and a 'State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT)' has been set up. One prominent school in each District will be identified as a District Resource Centre for Science Education which will act as a Nodal Agency for the development of science education in the whole District. Special attention has been bestowed on the educational upliftment of physically handicapped students and intensive training programmes for teachers of such institutions have been organised. A comprehensive eye-testing and eye-treatment programme for all the nearly six million school children of our State called "Sunetra" scheme has been successfully completed. I am extremely happy to announce that the District Primary Education Programme which was successfully implemented in three Districts, will be extended to three more Districts namely Palakkad, Idukki and Thiruvananthapuram, during the coming year. A 'Talent Support Fund' is also proposed to be constituted for extending financial assistance to talented children and child artists from economically backward families.

22. My Government have taken significant strides in the field of higher education by starting new job-oriented self-financing courses started in various Universities. This model of education has been acclaimed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in a recent judgement. New Universities like Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit and Malabar University will offer new courses in diverse and contemporary subjects. A very large number of new colleges and new courses have been started in backward areas and among backward sections of the population during the last two years. As a result of our persistent efforts, the 5th "Indian Institute of Management" (IIM) is being established at Kozhikode. My Government also propose to make computer education widespread both in Arts and Science and Technical Colleges.

23. My Government have decided to establish a new open University and a Cultural University in the State during the coming year. A Planetarium will be established in the Thripunithura Hill Palace premises. The conservation of the Cultural wealth of Kerala is a priority item for my Government. Arts and Artists are being given liberal encouragement and assistance for this purpose.

24. The Co-operative Sector in Kerala has consistently concentrated in conceptualising and implementing schemes for the benefit of farmers and weaker sections of the people. There has been a phenomenal growth in the working of Primary Agricultural Credit Societies in terms of membership, deposits and lending. In fact the Primary co-operatives of our State have become a model for the rest of India. Allegations of favouritism and corruption in the co-operative field have been effectively countered and controlled by my Government by the historic decision to entrust recruitment to State level Apex co-operatives and district co-operative banks to the Public Service Commission. The Kerala State Federation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Co-operatives has decided to establish an Ayurvedic Medicine Manufacturing Unit at Kalpetta with the assistance of the National Co-operatives Development Corporation benefiting more than 300 families belonging to the weaker sections. In tune with the recent emphasis on women's development, an apex federation of women's co-operatives is proposed to be set up at the State level for providing promotional, managerial, financial and marketing assistance. There is also a proposal for organising womens wings in selected Primary Agricultural Co-operatives for ensuring higher flow of financial assistance to women members.

25. The measures taken by my Government in extending the public distribution system of the State have, to a considerable extent, succeeded in containing the impact of price rise of essential commodities. Intensive efforts have been made to ensure steady supply of all essential commodities through Maveli Stores and other retail outlets. My Government have been successful in obtaining higher allocations of wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene to our State from the Government of India. During the Onam, Christmas and Ramzan seasons this year the availability of all essential articles at reasonable prices provided considerable relief to the public. It will be the constant endeavour of this Government to prevent price escalation and to bring relief to the public, especially the weaker sections.

26. My Government have been giving top priority for social welfare and social security measures rendering assistance to the weaker sections of society like Women, Children, Destitutes, Orphans and the Handicapped. The fifteen point programme launched during the year with its emphasis on implementing programmes meant to benefit the common man and weaker sections of the society has yielded positive results. The programme includes, inter alia, special schemes for additional employment opportunities, relief to farmers, supply of potable water and improvement of health services.

27. My Government could succeed in extending the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) to all the Rural Development Blocks of the State. A comprehensive state policy on women will be declared shortly and a Women's Commission will be constituted during the course of the year to strengthen women's development activities.

28. My Government intend to shortly declare a "State Policy for the handicapped" in line with the central legislation. A comprehensive survey of handicapped persons has been conducted under the auspices of the Kerala State Handicapped Persons Welfare Corporation and rehabilitation programmes drawn up. Government also propose to issue identity cards to all physically handicapped persons in the State which will enable them to claim eligible benefits. The autonomous 'C. H. Mohammed Koya Memorial State Institute of Mentally Handicapped' will be developed as an apex body for sponsoring and co-ordinating research in education, training and rehabilitation of the mentally handicapped.

29. My Government have already initiated computerisation of land records in selected districts. This ambitious programme will be adopted in the other districts also during the year. Work regarding the path breaking scheme of supplying Revenue Cards containing all basic details of each family is progressing satisfactorily and will be completed shortly. In addition to the innovative programmes of Grama Sabha, Taluk Sabha and file disposal workshops, my Government have introduced novel and historic programmes like "Survey Adalats" and 'Revenue Adalats'. In these adalats, thousands of old cases involving the interests of the public are settled finally. All these programmes have helped in speedy decision making. In the survey adalats, more than 3 lakhs of petitions were received and more than 137,000 were disposed of. Similarly, in the revenue adalats conducted in the districts, 117,000 petitions were received and nearly 90,000 could be disposed of.

30. Housing continues to be a priority area for my Government, special emphasis being accorded for houses for the weaker sections. The low cost and environment friendly housing technologies popularised by the Nirmithi movement have gained wide acceptance throughout the country. It is also a matter of great pride that the Kerala State Housing Board has been declared the best housing agency in India. The introduction of innovative schemes coupled with prompt repayment of loans are behind this impressive performance which has in turn been translated into quantum jumps in assistance from financial institutions like HUDCO.

31. The construction of 100 Housing Complexes aimed at rehabilitation of poramboke dwellers is progressing rapidly. Nirmithi Kendras will be set up in all panchayats in the State in a phased manner to encourage local participation and popularisation of the technologies developed by it. The path breaking scheme of constructing Revenue Towers in Taluk Headquarters is being expanded, with 22 more Revenue Towers to be constructed. In an effort to tackle the increasing requirements of urbanisation, two satellite townships near Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram will be set up.

32. It is with considerable pride that I recall that the people of our State had joined hands to bring solace to the victims of the disastrous earthquake at Latur in Maharashtra. The 'Kerala Village' at Latur, comprising of nearly 500 houses is a testimony to the solicitude and generosity of the people of Kerala as well as to the technical skills of our architects.

33. My Government are aware that the Hill and coastal areas remain far behind the rest of the State in terms of infrastructure, health, education and income. Tribals and fishermen are the most vulnerable sections of our society, as they live in very backward, undeveloped and sometimes inaccessible areas; and eke out a meagre existence subject to the vagaries of nature in the lean seasons. In order to facilitate integrated development of the hilly regions, a Special Officer has been appointed to establish a 'Hill Area Development Authority', which will commence functioning within a short period of time. An ambitious project for the long term integrated development of about 500 sq. kms. of degraded land has been started in Attappadi

with Japanese assistance which will directly benefit thousands of Tribals residing in the Area. Government have already decided to establish a 'Coastal Development Authority' in the State to focus attention on the peculiar problems of coastal areas and to ensure their integrated and comprehensive development.

34. My Government shall take all efforts for the welfare of the fishermen and development of the fisheries sector. The present surveillance machinery to control the intrusion of unauthorised vessels into the territorial waters will be strengthened by introducing additional well equipped patrolling vessels. All potential reservoirs will be made available for scientific aquaculture. The public water bodies will be given fish farming on long term lease under the modified lease policy. A master plan for the establishment of fish and prawn seed production centres will be formulated and implemented in a phased manner. Increased assistance will be given to establish mini hatcheries in the private sector.

35. In a historic step to ensure that funds earmarked for SC and ST development are fully utilised in the most essential sectors, my Government have decided to resort to pooling of all funds intended for SC and ST with effect from 1996-97. Funds under the SCP and TSP schemes will henceforth be pooled, and utilised in key areas like education, housing and provision of basic amenities to the SC/ST population. This will also prevent diversion of funds to other sectors or lapse of available funds.

36. Special attention will hereafter be focussed on the hitherto neglected sections of the SC/ST population. A comprehensive scheme for the upliftment of Specially Vulnerable Communities among the Scheduled Castes has been evolved. This programme aims at breaking the basic constraints that stand in the way of the development of the poorest of the poor. The newly registered Wayanad Tribal Health Care Society has been entrusted with the implementation of the Wayanad Health Project that aims at the amelioration of the health conditions of the Tribals of Wayanad District. The Scheme for modernisation of pre-primary education of the STs envisages extensive training, upgradation of facilities and setting up of new schools. Three model residential schools for ST students will be started at Attappadi, and Wayanad and Idukki District.

37. By setting up the popularly elected Panchayat Raj Institutions, my Government have strongly reaffirmed their commitment to a decentralised system of administration and planning as embodied in Mahatma Gandhi's dream of democratic decentralisation. A large number of powers, both financial and developmental, hitherto exercised by Government, have already been transferred to these local bodies. This devolution will be strengthened and carried forward next year and they will be given substantial autonomy and financial independence to become powerful instruments of local development. My Government would be setting aside adequate funds for the effective functioning of local bodies. The Annual Plan for 1996-97, the last of the Eighth Five Year Plan, will take into account the needs of the newly created Panchayati Raj Institutions in successfully implementing the developmental functions that are transferred to them. The State Finance Commission is expected to submit its report shortly, which would further strengthen the finances of local bodies.

38. With the active involvement of local bodies, rural development programmes have achieved remarkable progress during the year, with an all-time high 'per family investment' of Rs. 16360 in the Integrated Rural Development Programme. Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) has been given special emphasis and is now being implemented in all districts with focus on information, education and communication in the fields of sanitation and hygiene. It is a matter of satisfaction to note that 17,100 new houses have already been completed during this year under the Jawhar Rozgar Yojana and the figure is expected to touch 34,000 by the end of the financial year.

39. Two major programmes in Urban Poverty Eradication were launched recently. The Prime Minister's Integrated Urban Poverty Eradication Programme has been initiated in 9 Class-II towns of the State. A Special Urban Poverty Eradication Project has been launched in Kochi with the assistance of the British Overseas Development Agency. An integrated programme for total sanitation in the State has been launched by name "Cleaner Kerala" project; and a comprehensive programme for mosquito eradication in all the 14 Districts of the State has already been started.

40. Alcoholism is the root cause of many of the problems affecting our society today. This is specially so in the case of the poor people in whose case the consumption of alcohol often results in family strife, marital discord and neglect of growing children, as hard earned wages are spent on liquor at the expense of essentials of life like food, clothing and shelter. My Government are committed to the eradication

of alcoholism and to the introduction of prohibition in a phased manner, notwithstanding the great loss of revenue that this entails. The abolition of sale of arrack in the State with effect from 1-4-1996 is an emphatic affirmation of my Government's policy in this regard. Stringent measures will be taken to prevent illicit distillation and the enforcement machinery will be considerably strengthened. A scheme for the rehabilitation of liquor shop workers, who will be deprived of employment due to the new Abkari policy of Government, will be chalked out and implemented shortly.

41. My Government are intent on eradicating corruption at all levels and have proposed to constitute a Vigilance Commission, with a sitting Judge of the High Court as Chairman, as soon as the resident's assent is received.

42. My Government are determined to maintain peace and harmony in the sphere of industrial relations. All possible measures will be taken to ensure that various labour laws are enforced effectively, to benefit the working class. Constitution of a State Arbitration Board for the speedy settlement of industrial disputes is under consideration. Government have decided to constitute a welfare fund for the ration dealers of the State. Setting up of new Welfare Fund for workers in Plantations, Private hospitals, Beedi industry, Bamboo and Palmyra Industries, Printing Presses and Laundries as well as for Barbers, Fish vendors and fish processing workers is also under consideration. Government are also anxious to ensure better health to the labourers working in the factories. The Occupational Health Monitoring Programme implemented by the Factories and Boilers Department will continue vigorously during 1996-97. A new scheme of Medical surveillance of the Industrial Workers is also under the active consideration of Government. My Government has recently established Employment Exchanges in all the Taluks of the State and have also established 3 specialised employment exchanges for handicapped persons in the 3 regions. Government propose to start a N.R.I. Cell in the Labour Commissioner's Office, to look into the problems of those NRIs who are put to difficulties by the exploitation of spurious man-power recruiting agencies, fraudulent foreign employers etc., as well as those NRIs who fall sick, meet with accidents and death in foreign countries. Three rehabilitation centres for rehabilitating the rescued child labourers will be established at Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi and Kozhikode with the financial assistance of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

43. We have to recall with gratitude the Yeomen Service rendered by our defence personnel in protecting the sovereignty of the Nation. My Government have sanctioned the formation of an Ex-Servicemen Development Corporation which will undertake schemes for the benefit of the Ex-Servicemen and their families. In recognition of the great sacrifices of our defence personnel, an impressive War Memorial will be constructed at Thiruvananthapuram.

44. My Government are determined to take all possible action to maintain harmony and peace in our society. A 'Rapid Action Force' is being set up to deal with grave Law and Order situations, particularly those with communal overtones. Government of India's assistance would also be utilised to the fullest extent to modernise the Police Force and to provide buildings and other facilities. A complete network system connecting all Police Stations in the State will be established in the coming year. A Police Academy for imparting intensive training to Police Officers of various ranks will also be set up within three years utilising institutional finance. My Government propose to expand and strengthen the availability of Fire Services in the State by recruiting additional 1,000 firemen and other operating staff, setting up new fire stations and establishing a fully equipped Fire Training Centre to impart regular training to the officers and men of the Fire force.

45. My Government propose to upgrade and hasten the system of dispensation of justice in the State by setting up additional courts and tribunals during the next financial year and will vigorously continue the ongoing scheme of constructing buildings for courts and quarters for judicial officers. A new Open Jail and three well equipped prison hospitals—one for each central jail—will be established in the State next year. A computer network connecting the three central jails and the open jail with the jail headquarters is also proposed to be established.

46. Our State has always performed well in respect of all health parameters. It is a matter of pride for us that we have not had even a single reported polio case since July 1994. Government have decided to give special attention to the health problems of the children. A Child Development Centre will be set up in three stages. The objective is to prevent neurological childhood disability by early intervention. Special emphasis will also be laid on strengthening infrastructure facilities in the health institutions of the

backward districts of Idukki, Wayanad and Kasaragod. My Government have also decided to strengthen the casualty wings by starting 'Trauma Care Centres' in all Medical/College Hospitals. Steps have already been taken to establish a Naturopathy Department in the State and a few naturopathy hospitals will be set up in select districts this year in order to give due importance to alternative systems of health care. The Kerala Health Research and Welfare Society has already taken steps to set up Cardiac Catheterisation Laboratories in the Medical Colleges at Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram this year. The Society is also exploring the possibility of setting up one more such laboratory in the Kottayam Medical College. This will be of great benefit to the public who will have facility for angiogram tests and by-pass surgery at affordable prices.

47. My Government have already accepted the recommendations of the "Prathapan Commission" to improve the career prospects of the Government Medical Officers so as to make them more contented and committed to their duty. Massive training programmes for doctors and paramedical staff are also proposed to be organised for improving the efficiency of health services provided to people. Steps are also being taken to establish more Ayurvedic and Homoeopathic Hospitals in the State.

48. As part of the National Forestry Action Plan, my Government have drawn up a State Forestry Action Plan for conservation and management of this precious natural resource. Proposals for improved management of forests in future have been evolved so as to conserve the biodiversity and the national heritage of forests and for improving production to meet the local and industrial requirements in an environmentally sensitive manner. A comprehensive programme for the conservation of 'Serpent Groves' in the State has been started; and a unique experiment of establishing a new Mangrove forests by name "Gandhi Vanam" has been launched at Purakkad in Alappuzha district, thus establishing a forest in the one district of the State which has no forest at all. Another important programme of the Forest Department is to establish a large number of herbal gardens for medicinal plants.

49. Kerala has always demonstrated to the world that striking success could be achieved even in the face of overwhelming problems and constraints. This has been possible due to the earnest efforts of the State Government, actively aided by constructive support from all sections of the society. Let us continue to tread the unique path of progress we have adopted, as a source of inspiration and a model for other states to follow. I request your wholehearted co-operation and assistance in realising our [goals for [the betterment of our people.

50. I wish the deliberations of this session all success.

JAI HIND