

Speech by the President of India, Shri Pranab Kumar Mukherjee
to the Members of the Kerala Legislative Assembly on 30-10-2012

Hon'ble Governor of Kerala, Shri H.R. Bharadwaj, Hon'ble Speaker of Kerala Legislative Assembly, Shri G. Karthikeyan, Chief Minister of Kerala, Shri Oommen Chandy, Leader of the Opposition of the Kerala Legislative Assembly, Shri V.S. Achuthananthan, Ministers, Deputy Speakers, Members of the State Legislative Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a privilege and honour to be here with you today and be part of the celebrations of 125 years of the Legislative bodies in Kerala. I am grateful to the Hon'ble Speaker for his kind invitation and for having provided me the opportunity to meet you all.

I understand that two of my distinguished predecessors Shri K.R Narayanan and Dr. A P. J. Abdul Kalam have addressed this august House in recent times. I am delighted to be here in this beautiful complex, which combines traditional architecture and modern technology. The statues of Gandhiji, Pandit Jawharlal Nehru and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in front of the Assembly Complex is a testimony of Kerala's proud tradition of upholding national integration and its commitment to living up to the ideals of these great leaders. I am happy

to know that the Kerala Legislative Assembly has a Golden Jubilee Museum, perhaps the first for any State Legislature in India. I am given to understand that the museum building has been declared as a heritage building and is also has a new built section that showcases the history of Kerala's democratic institutions with the help of state-of the-art technology. I am happy to know that the State Legislature has set up a Training Cell for improving education in parliamentary practices and procedures to the Legislators.

I am greatly impressed by the Green initiatives being launched by the Kerala Legislative Assembly. These initiatives reflect the dynamism and enterprise of the Speaker and the willingness of Kerala's Legislators to innovate, be responsive to the needs of the time and show leadership in protecting the environment.

Friends, you are privileged to be the members of one of the oldest representative bodies in our country. You are torchbearers of parliamentary traditions initiated in 1888, in the erstwhile Travancore State. The representation of people in the Legislative bodies in Travancore and Kochi accelerated the democratic process and paved the way for the establishment of popular Assemblies representing the people's aspirations and will in governance. Travancore has the credit of

having conducted elections on the basis of universal adult franchise way back in 1948 four years before the whole nation adopted it, becoming among the first native states of India to do so, in fact first of the provinces also.

This Assembly has over the years pioneered many unique political initiatives which the rest of the country and the world at large had watched with great interest. Legislation in the fields of Land Reforms, Education, Social Welfare, democratic decentralization, anti-corruption etc. passed by the Kerala Legislative Assembly are amongst the best examples of the use of democratic institutions in bringing socio-economic and political transformation. This also bears the testimony of Indian Constitution which was once described by Sal Anthony Eden as the great Magna Carta of socio-economic transformation in the form of Constitutional Laws. The fruits of these legislations can be seen in Kerala's achievements in the fields of literacy, population control, labour welfare and promoting socio-economic equality. Let me on this occasion remember some of the stalwarts from Kerala who have left a lasting impression on state and national life like Shri V.K. Krishna Menon, Shri A.K Gopalan, Panampally Shri Govinda Menon, Shri C.M. Stephen, Shri E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Shri C. Achutha Menon and Shri K.

Karunakaran. I had the privilege in my public life to work with many of them in close co-operation and inter action.

Decentralization of power is the sine qua non of the true democracy. Kerala Legislative Assembly has pioneered efforts in this field as proved by the numerous legislations relating to the Constitution and development of local bodies.

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate Kerala on having ensured 50% reservation for women in local bodies. I also compliment Kerala in ensuring accountability and transparency in administration through the effective implementation of the Right to Services Act.

A steady and stable Government is indispensable for the implementation of policies formulated for the integrated development of society. Kerala has witnessed coalition Governments completing their full 5-year term uninterruptedly. In that respect too, Kerala has shown the country a practical model, which is now being experimented even at the national level.

An important contribution of Kerala in the legislative sphere has also been the system of the Subject Committees which has since been adopted into the Parliamentary Standing Committees at the Central level and almost in all States Legislative Assemblies. I am happy to note that

the number of Subject Committees has now increased from 10 to 14 at present. I am also glad to know that the welfare measures enshrined in the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution has given shape to several welfare committees of the Kerala Legislature. The establishment of Committees for the welfare of Senior Citizens, Non-Resident Keralites, Fishermen, Women and the physically challenged are praise-worthy.

I am informed that the Kerala Assembly has met 3000 days since 1957 and has the record of having an average of 53-54 days of sitting in a year. Though it is ahead of most of the state legislatures in this regard, I do believe there is considerable scope for further improvement. The Presiding Officers Conference has time and again reiterated the need for holding a minimum of 100 days sittings every year. I appeal to the Legislators to strive and do their best in this regard and to achieve this target. Kerala is proud of its achieving 100% literacy and is the first of the Indian States to achieve this record. Similarly in the case of days of the number of sittings of State Legislative Assembly, I would request Kerala Legislators to be the pioneers. I hope the Legislators of this Assembly will take up 100 days of sittings as a similar challenge and strive to achieve this goal.

Friends, being a representative of the people is a matter of privilege and a great honour. This privilege however carries a great responsibility. Elected representatives have many roles to play and there are competing demands - from one's Party, from the Assembly and from the constituency. The job of a Legislator is 24 multiplied by 7 responsibility. They have to be sensitive and responsive to the problems and concerns of the people, give voice to their grievances, hardships and problems by raising them on the floor of the House and act as the link between the people and the Government. People expect their representatives to participate effectively in the deliberations of the House. Shortly you will remember it is possible if the business of the House is conducted in an orderly manner without frequent disruptions and adjournment.

The Constitution of India places the Legislative Assembly at the centre of governance in a State and conceives of it as the primary instrument of socio-economic changes. The primary responsibility of State Legislature is to enact laws required for good governance and administration of the State. List-II of the Seventh Schedule of our Constitution lists 66 items for State administration and legislation.

There is need for utmost caution in matters of legislation, money and finance. Elected representatives have exclusive control over money and finance. No expenditure can be incurred by the Executive without approval of the State Legislative Assembly, no tax can be levied except by a law passed by the State Legislative Assembly and no money can be withdrawn from the Consolidated Fund of the State without the approval of the Legislature through Appropriation Bill. With the heightened complexity of administration and legislation, Legislators must ensure adequate discussion and critical scrutiny before passing the legislation. It is sad that across the country, time devoted by Legislators towards legislation and discussions on the Budget, money and other financial matters are gradually declining. Recently a study conducted by some experts clearly demonstrate that in the first and second Lok Sabha, time devoted to Legislations and on matters related to money and finance were two third of the total time engaged by the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha in conducting its business. Please remember in those days our budgetary transaction was extremely limited. In fact the first budget presented by first Finance Minister of independent India, Shanmughom Chetty on 14th of November, 1947 was just a total budget of Rs. 293 crores and the last budget which I presented on 28th February 2012

before I assume this office being elected, it was more than Rs.12 lakh crores. The volume of financial transactions in the plan expenditure, the total size of the first plan was little less than Rs. 2000 crores. The total outlay in public sector investments in eleventh plan was more than Rs.11 lakh crores and if the time devoted to discuss on these transactions gradually get shrinkage, I am afraid elected representatives of the people are not discharging their duties and responsibilities and doing justice to their elected office. Please remember and I would expect this progressive Legislature will show the path, which will be emulated and followed by others.

The Legislative Assembly is also the master of the Executive in the sense that the Chief Minister along with his Council of Ministers is accountable collectively and severely to the Legislative Assembly. The Executive can be unseated at any time by passing a resolution of No Confidence in the State Legislative Assembly by a simple majority not by any special majority. Moreover, most of the instruments of governance are executed through the appropriate laws passed by the Legislatures. The Executive's dependence on Legislature is total and it is essential that legislatures are responsible and responsive to this huge

task entrusted on them by the Constitution to keep the wheels of our democratic functioning moving uninterruptedly and smoothly.

Parliamentary practices, procedures and conventions are all meant to provide for orderly and expeditious transaction of business. The imperative of maintaining discipline and decorum in the House and the observance of rules, conventions and etiquette can hardly be over-emphasised. Dissent is a recognized democratic expression, but it should be expressed with decency and within the contours and parameters of the parliamentary practices and devices. The cardinal principle of effective functioning of a Parliamentary system is that majority will rule and minority will oppose, expose and if possible, depose. But this should be done within the framework of the rules framed by the Legislators themselves. The minority has to accept the decisions of the majority while the majority has to respect the views of the minority in formulating the policies. Disruption should never be allowed to be used as an effective Parliamentary intervention. It should be the endeavour of every Legislator to ensure that the content and the quality of debates that take place in the chambers are of a high order befitting their status as people's representatives. As members of different political Parties, individual Legislators would be guided by their

respective Party's manifestos and policies. However, there are a large number of issues of development and public welfare, which transcend all narrow political considerations and barriers. The entire Assembly must work jointly for the benefit of the people, the State and the country.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, in one of his renowned expositions in the Lok Sabha, once observed: " Parliamentary democracy demands many virtues. It demands a certain devotion to work. But it demands also a large measure of co-operation, of self-discipline, of self-restraint. It is obvious that a House like this cannot perform any functions without a spirit of co-operation, without a large measure of restraint and self-discipline in each group and individual ".

There may be issues that agitate the minds of the members and naturally they want to bring these to the notice of the House. Sometimes, you may feel frustrated about the lack of opportunity for participating effectively in the proceedings. But please remember that even to avail that limited opportunity the House has to function. Disruption and adjournment is not an answer.

It does not behove a people's representative to indulge in unruly behaviour or to use unparliamentary language on the floor of the House. Frequent adjournments of the House and unruly behaviour by members

create a negative impression in the minds of the people, particularly with the proceedings now being telecast live. Such incidents can only accentuate the feeling of cynicism among the citizens, particularly among the youth about the viability of our system of governance itself. We must bear in mind that the most important element that goes into the sustenance of the system is the people's faith in the effectiveness of the system and its ability to address their hopes and concerns.

There is need for collective thinking by all political parties and leaders of our country on how to ensure smooth running of our Parliament and Legislative Assemblies and whether some of the existing rules need to be amended for the purpose. We should also examine whether our Committees can consider some of the issues including the post-approval scrutiny of budgetary allocations made to various Ministries. If you examine the work of any Public Accounts Committee, you will find out of the grants in the case of Union Government draws more than hundreds, in the States also it is, number of the grants which Assembly approves are substantial. All of them are never scrutinised by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India or by the Accountant General of the States. All of them are not reported to the Public Accounts Committee and if every one of them are reported to the Public

Accounts Committee, it does not have the time to scrutinize. Now most of the time we works, see that the Subject Committee or the relevant Parliamentary Standing Committee discuss the demands for grants before the Budget is finally approved by the Assembly or by Lok Sabha. Therefore whether it is possible to examine even after the budget is finally approved atleast for information and taking the corrective decisions in future, post approval scrutiny of those demands which escape the notice of the Accountant General or those of the Public Accounts Committee. I leave the suggestion for your consideration.

Friends, what we need for the successful working of Parliamentary democracy is more and more Legislators with skill, ability, wisdom and a high degree of integrity. We need to be ever vigilant about the rising expectations of the people, welfare of the people, who are our real masters, should be the ultimate common goal.

As Nobel laureate Shri Amartya Sen has said Kerala is a shining example of the use of public action leading to equitable distribution of social and human development and a high quality of life, despite relatively low industrialization.

Kerala has been a pioneer and a path-breaker in many fields. Near universal literacy and enrolment in schools has been achieved. Fertility

rate of the people has declined below replacement level. The overall sex ratio is in favour of women and women enjoy higher life expectancy than men. Infant and maternal mortality is low. Kerala's economic growth rate is higher than the national average. Tourism as well as information technology have been a particular success in recent times. Kerala has the highest per-capita readership of the newspapers and periodicals. It is home to rich and vibrant literary, theatrical and cinematical, cultural as well as enterprising and socially conscious people.

These remarkable achievements have been made possible, among other things because of the inspiring leadership provided by this State Legislature and your illustrious predecessors. There is however no room for complacency. Kerala continues to confront a number of challenges. Political violence has been a major topic of debate recently. There is a need to restore faith in the process of democratic and peaceful political participation. Industrialization and creation of jobs needs to gather speed. The remittance of revenue from non-resident Keralites have to be channelized into long-term development activities and building of infrastructure. Problems of developed economies like life style diseases, mental illness, depression, suicides, divorces etc. are on the rise. With

while an aging population, care of the elderly is a major concern. Rapid urbanization in this densely populated State has resulted in growing conflicts of various kinds including on the critical issue of waste management and disposal.

In the past, Kerala has led the country through progressive legislation, social welfare measures and impressive achievements in the field of education and health. The time has now come for the State also to show leadership in addressing these second generation challenges by finding innovative solutions and new methods of mobilizing society for collective welfare. The time has come for a 'Kerala Model - Version 2' to be developed and elected representatives of the State have to take the leadership in this regard.

I am sure all of you are fully conscious of your responsibilities and will strive ceaselessly to honour your solemn commitment to the people of Kerala. Permit me to conclude remembering the words of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore at the inauguration of the Mahajati Sadan or 'House of the Nation' on August 19, 1939 in the presence of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. Speaking of my home State Bengal, Tagore said " Let Bengal's arm lend strength to India's arm, let Bengal's message make India's message come true ".

Let me echo his words today and say "Let Kerala's actions lend strength to India and let Kerala's message of pluralism, tolerance, progressive thinking and equitable, inclusive development become the message of India".

Thank you,

Jai Hind.

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