

President Pratibha Patil's address to Parliament - 2010

Honourable Members,

1. My greetings to you as you assemble here today for the first session of both Houses of Parliament in the new decade. I am confident that all members would dedicate themselves to making this decade a glorious period in our country's march to prosperity and to its rightful place in the comity of nations. A heavy legislative agenda awaits you, which merits your careful attention.

2. I wish to convey my heartfelt condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives in the recent terrorist act in Pune. Left wing extremists continue to indulge in senseless violence, as in their recent attacks in West Bengal, where a large number of innocent lives have been lost. These cowardly acts strengthen our resolve to meet with added vigour the challenge posed by such violence. My government has also given a call to left wing extremists to abjure violence and come for talks. Our plan to strengthen civil administration and bring the fruits of inclusive development to all would continue with determination.

3. My government was voted to office with a clear cut mandate to protect and deepen the values of pluralism and secularism, and to ensure rapid growth with justice and fairness for all. Since assuming office in May 2009, my government has worked single-mindedly to build on the achievements of its earlier term to deliver the promise of faster and more inclusive growth. The *aam aadmi* was and is at the core of this promise; the *aam aadmi* had to be protected against the ravages of the worst ever global economic crisis since the Great Depression and against the failure of the monsoon in large parts of the country in mid-2009.

4. My government has combined a caring and sensitive approach in dealing with the immediate economic and social problems, has taken measures to strengthen the nation's security, has proceeded with a desire to accommodate disparate political and regional voices, has sincerely worked towards deepening our federal polity, has vigorously pursued our enlightened national interests in pro-actively engaging with the global community, and has introduced sensitivity in the partnership between the institutions of governance and civil society.

5. The global economic slowdown was met by strong policies of administering a domestic stimulus to the economy which has yielded handsome results. Economic growth which had slowed to 6.7% in 2008-09 is likely to improve to around 7.5% in 2009-10. At a time when industrialised countries have experienced negative growth, India has continued to grow at an impressive rate.

6. The unexpected and severe drought posed special challenges in managing the economy in 2009. My government joined hands with the states to help the farmers in minimizing the impact of this massive adversity. A sum of more than Rs. 4000 crore has so far been allocated from the National Calamity Contingency Fund and the Calamity Relief Fund to the drought affected States. A Diesel Subsidy Scheme was introduced. Funds under Centrally Sponsored Schemes such as the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, and the National Food Security Mission were permitted to be used to create agricultural infrastructure for facilitating crop specific strategies, to minimize loss in production due to drought. An amendment in the Mahatma Gandhi National

Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme was made to allow water conservation works in the fields of small and marginal farmers as well. It was due to these efforts that the fall in food production could be contained to a large extent. Special efforts were made to ensure that rabi production was not affected.

7. While we were able to avert any threat to our food security, there has been an unhappy pressure on the prices of food grains and food products. Higher prices were inevitable given the shortfall in domestic production and prevailing high prices of rice, cereals and edible oils globally. They are also to some extent a reflection of the implementation of our schemes of inclusive growth involving payment of higher procurement prices to our farmers and the impact of higher public spending on programmes of rural development, which have successfully raised incomes in rural areas.

8. My government continues to accord the highest importance to ensuring relief to the aam aadmi on food prices. Despite a significant increase in the procurement prices of food grains, central issue prices for purposes of public distribution have been kept constant since 2002. The import regime for essential commodities has been liberalized. Government has decided to release 30 lakh tonnes of wheat and rice in the open market over the next two months, and release 5 lakh tonnes of wheat and 2 lakh tonnes of rice through the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation and the National Cooperative Consumers' Federation and their affiliated cooperatives, to benefit consumers at the retail level. Government has also released an additional allocation of 36 lakh tonnes of wheat and rice for distribution to card holders over the months of January and February, 2010. This will be available to card holders over and above their normal allocations under the public distribution system. The scheme for subsidy on edible oils and pulses has been continued. State governments have been advised to ensure effective action at the state level through de-hoarding, and appropriate use of state agencies such as Civil Supplies Corporations for the procurement of non-PDS food articles in bulk. The imports of wheat and refined sugar have been further liberalised. Steps have been taken to strictly check the smuggling of sugar. Government recently convened a meeting of the Chief Ministers and State Ministers of Food and Civil Supplies to discuss issues related to the rise in the prices of food articles and evolve a coordinated strategy. A Core Group consisting of senior Ministers of the Union Government and some Chief Ministers has been constituted to examine a wide range of related policy issues.

Honourable Members,

9. In the longer term, our food security can be ensured only through sustained efforts at increasing agricultural productivity combined with a comprehensive reform of the public distribution system and open market intervention. My government is committed to bringing forth a legislation to ensure food security.

10. We now look forward confidently to further improvement in our growth performance in 2010-11. My government will aim at a growth rate above 8% in 2010-11 and seek to achieve 9% growth in 2011-12. We will concentrate on infrastructure development, agriculture and rural development, education and health and ensure that the growth process is adequately sensitive to the concerns and well being of the weaker sections of society. We will work to create an environment which encourages investments, including in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises.

11. My government has taken several new measures to strengthen the security apparatus of the country to equip it to meet the grave challenge posed by terrorism. These include strengthening of the state and district police machinery and Central Para-Military Forces, operationalization of the National Investigation Agency, establishment of four National Security Guard hubs to ensure quick and effective response to any possible terror attack, augmentation of the strength of the Intelligence Bureau, strengthening of the Multi-Agency Centre in the Intelligence Bureau to enable it to function on a round-the-clock basis, and strengthening of coastal security.

12. Government remains vigilant against all forms of challenges posed by terrorism. Zero tolerance of terrorist activities is our principled policy. We have to keep constant watch and innovate against global terrorist groups.

13. The overall internal security, law and order, and the communal situation remained largely under control during 2009. Infiltration of terrorists from across the line of control in Jammu and Kashmir has gone up. Even then, the security situation has improved significantly in Jammu and Kashmir as well as in the North East, but left wing extremism continues to be a significant cause of concern.

14. The Nation is proud of our armed forces. They have distinguished themselves in preserving the country's unity and territorial integrity and in defending our borders. Government is fully committed to the modernization of the armed forces. We will accord the highest priority to modernisation programmes to equip our armed forces with the required weaponry, equipment and platforms. The successful launch of the Agni-III missile is a shining example of the capabilities of our scientists and engineers who deserve full praise. Efforts to enhance our technological self-reliance received a new impetus with the commencement of the handing over of the main battle tank, Arjun, to the Indian Army.

15. My government is committed to the welfare of servicemen and ex-servicemen. An Armed Forces Tribunal has been established for adjudication of complaints and disputes regarding service matters and other appeals. The recommendations regarding substantial improvements in the pensionary benefits of personnel below officers rank and commissioned officers have been accepted.

Honourable Members,

16. My government firmly believes that the time has come to focus on ensuring that the processes of governance are sensitized, administrative instruments sharpened, and that the benefits of welfare programmes reach the aam aadmi. This commitment to canons of good governance must guide the massive slew of rural and urban reconstruction initiatives under Bharat Nirman, and other schemes for ensuring inclusive growth and social protection.

17. The pace of implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has picked up considerably. During 2009-10, so far, 4.33 crore households have been provided employment and 203 crore person-days were generated. This scheme has benefited the marginalised sections, with the participation rate of Scheduled Castes and Tribes being about 52%. Participation of women has also been encouraging at around 49%. The scheme has also resulted in an upward revision of rural wages.

18. My government remains committed to completing the remaining tasks of Bharat Nirman in its second phase.

19. Under the rural housing component, during 2009-10, upto last December, 14 lakh houses have been constructed. Under the rural roads component, up to November, 2009, connectivity has been provided to nearly 34 thousand villages through the construction of 96 thousand kilometers of roads. Under the rural water supply component, of the remaining 627 uncovered habitations, 586 have been taken up in 2009-10. Of the 1.79 lakh quality-affected habitations, about 35 thousand have been taken up in 2009-10. Under the irrigation component, which began in 2005-06, creation of irrigation potential of one crore hectares is targeted by 2011-12. As on 31.12.2009, coverage of more than 70 lakh hectares has been achieved.

20. The Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana has resulted in the electrification of more than 67 thousand villages. Free electricity connections have been provided to nearly 84 lakh below poverty line households. Steps have been initiated to achieve rural tele-density of 40% by 2014.

21. The urban sector of our country poses a challenge and presents an opportunity too. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission was launched in 2005 to address this challenge and harness the opportunity. Under the mission, projects worth over Rs. one lakh crore have been approved for urban development and welfare of the urban poor.

22. Urban housing and slums continue to demand our attention. Government is working on the ambitious Rajiv Awas Yojana to assist states that are willing to assign property rights to people living in slums. This programme will strive to create a formal space for slum dwellers within our cities and transform and redevelop these cities to make them slum-free.

23. The micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) sector is vital for sustained and inclusive growth. Government will take necessary steps to expeditiously implement the recommendations of the Task Force on MSMEs. These include improved credit access, development of infrastructure, strengthening of the District Industries Centres, improved raw material supply, facilitating of product marketing, and institutional reforms.

Honourable Members,

24. My government subscribes to the idea of a balanced approach to national development, with special attention to our border states.

25. The Prime Minister's reconstruction plan for Jammu and Kashmir has been working well. Roads, colleges, Industrial Training Institutes, and Anganwadi centres have been taken up on an urgent basis under this initiative. An additional 500 megawatts of power has been provided to the state during the winter months.

26. My government remains committed to the rapid development of infrastructure in the North-Eastern States. The Special Accelerated Road Development Programme covering almost 10,000 kilometers is in progress. This project will provide minimum two-lane national highway link to all the State capitals, and to each district in these States. This includes over 1600 kilometers long

Trans-Arunachal Highway. A special programme to provide home lighting systems to all the border villages of Arunachal Pradesh is at an advanced stage of implementation.

Honourable Members,

27. It is imperative that as our economy grows apace, the disadvantaged sections of society be made part of the Indian success story.

28. Under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, nearly seven lakh titles have been distributed so far. Further efforts will be made, in conjunction with State Governments, to ensure early disposal of the remaining claims.

29. Government has developed a comprehensive roadmap for the development of minority communities. Credit flows to the minority communities have risen to Rs. 82000 crore in 2008-09, which exceeds 12% of the total priority sector lending. Recruitment of minorities to posts under the Central Government has gone up steadily. In fresh recruitments, minority representation has increased from 7% in 2006-07 to more than 9% in 2008-09.

30. The Multi-sectoral Development Programme for minority concentration districts has started off well. The three scholarship schemes started in 2007-08 have received an overwhelming response. The number of scholarships awarded has gone up to nearly 15 lakh. Girls constitute a very significant proportion of the awardees.

31. My government will bring a proposal to amend the Waqf Act during this session of Parliament.

32. Our unity and social harmony is the best answer to the terrorists and their divisive designs. Hence, government is committed deeply to protecting our social fabric and to that end, it proposes to move for the early passage of the Communal Violence (Prevention, Control and Rehabilitation of Victims) Bill, 2005, in this Session of Parliament.

33. My government is committed to ensuring early passage of the Women's Reservation Bill which was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in May 2008. Honourable Members, I would urge you to accord special attention to this critical proposal.

34. Two bills for constitutional amendment to provide 50% reservation for women in panchayats and urban local bodies have already been introduced and it is hoped that these can be passed during this session.

35. The National Youth Corps Scheme has been introduced to enable young men and women between the age group of 25 to 35 years, to serve two years in nation-building activities. In the first phase 20 thousand volunteers would be deployed and they would be utilized in several creative social activities like cleaning the Dal Lake in Jammu and Kashmir.

Honourable Members,

36. Investment in education is critical for accelerated inclusive growth. Government has made substantial investments in primary education through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Midday Meal Programme, and is moving towards universalization of education at the secondary level with the new Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 has been notified to be effective from 1st April, 2010. A scheme to assist State Governments in setting up 373 model colleges in educationally backward districts has been approved. A National Mission for Education through Information and Communication Technology has been launched to provide broadband internet connectivity to around 18,000 colleges and 400 universities in the country. A scheme to provide interest subsidy on educational loans taken by students from economically weak families has also been launched. A new campaign called "Sakshar Bharat", with special focus on female literacy, has been started.

Honourable Members,

37. My government is committed to bringing about a paradigm shift in our education infrastructure based on the three pillars of expansion, inclusion and excellence. A National Council for Higher Education and Research will soon be established as an overarching body to regulate higher education and research in India. Government is endeavouring to bring forward an appropriate legislation for facilitating the participation of globally renowned and quality academic institutions in our higher education sector, and for bringing in foreign education providers for vocational training and skill development.

38. For providing the common man an opportunity to share in the growth of the central public sector enterprises, government has decided to list profitable companies on the stock exchanges through a public offer of at least 10% of the equity.

39. My government has taken several steps to meet the challenge of climate change. The National Action Plan on Climate Change is being operationalised. The Jawahar Lal Nehru National Solar Mission has been launched with an ambitious target of 20 thousand megawatts of solar power by 2022.

40. A mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency has been approved, and it is expected to work towards saving of 10 thousand megawatts of electricity by the end of the Eleventh Plan.

41. To ensure expeditious and effective disposal of civil cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests, a National Green Tribunal Bill, 2009 has been introduced.

42. The economy remains critically dependent on oil and gas. After the near stagnation in production for about a decade, the year 2009-10 is set to register a major increase, with 20 new oil discoveries.

43. My government is committed to give the aam aadmi maximum access to gas and petroleum products. A new scheme of rural LPG distribution namely, 'Rajiv Gandhi Gramin LPG Vitarak Yojana' has been launched.

44. With a view to meeting the objective of 'Power to All' by 2012, as stated in the National Electricity Policy, a special effort has been made to encourage expansion in electricity generation capacity. As a result, during the Eleventh Five Year Plan we expect to add more than three times the capacity that was added in the Tenth Plan.

45. My government has announced a quantum jump in the pace of developing National Highways to reach 20 kilometers a day. Several policy initiatives have been taken to create an enabling environment. There is a fresh momentum in the development of National Highways.

46. The Civil Aviation sector could not remain unaffected by the global slowdown. Our national carrier, Air India, was particularly badly hit. Steps are being taken for its early rehabilitation under the careful guidance of a Group of Ministers.

47. The expansion and modernization of airports, especially the four metro airports, are progressing well. The Delhi airport project would be fully operational by July, 2010, well in time for the Commonwealth Games. The Airports Economic Regulatory Authority has been established to discharge regulatory functions in the airport sector.

48. My government has been implementing the National Maritime Development Programme which envisages an investment of over Rupees one lakh crore, including private investment, on identified projects in the port and shipping sectors. The Indian Maritime University has now become fully functional with campuses in Chennai, Mumbai, Kolkata, Visakhapatnam and Kochi.

49. The Indian Railways knit this vast country together. My government is committed to fulfilling a substantial expansion in capacity and modernisation of railway technology and to increasing the speed of both passenger and freight trains, while improving safety.

50. Train services have commenced in the entire Kashmir Valley, from Qazigund to Baramulla, demonstrating the commitment of my government to the development of all corners of our country. A special North East Rail Development Fund has been created, to provide assured financing for nine major national projects in the North Eastern region.

51. The Indian Railways have also commenced work on the ambitious Dedicated Freight Corridors on the Eastern and Western trunk routes. This project would help drive India's growth.

52. Government, in partnership with the Government of Japan, has moved ahead on implementing the ambitious Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor project. This challenging initiative, embracing six States, will provide impetus to industrial development in an environmentally sustainable manner, by providing quality infrastructure, efficient transportation, reliable energy supplies and efficient logistics.

53. My government is committed to the goal of extending the benefits of modern communication facilities to rural areas. Financial support is provided from Universal Service Obligation Fund to provide infrastructure for rural connectivity. My government has already initiated action to set up 10 thousand towers in 2010-11 for connecting remote areas across the country. As against the target of 60 crore telephone connections by 2012, the achievement

already exceeds 57 crore, with an unprecedented addition of nearly 2 crore connections in the month of December 2009 itself.

54. Mission Clean Ganga, under the aegis of the National Ganga River Basin Authority is expected to ensure that by the year 2020, no untreated municipal sewage and industrial effluents flow into the Ganga. This task, to ensure both nirmal dhara and aviral dhara, would involve collective and coordinated efforts of the Centre and the States concerned.

Honourable Members,

55. In the inclusive society that we aspire for, people must have confidence and access to a fair system of justice. Government has decided to set up a National Mission for the Delivery of Justice and Legal Reforms aimed at transforming the government into a responsible and cautious litigant, introducing judicial management, leveraging information and communication technology to improve court administration and case management and reducing pendency of arrears.

56. Our quest for good health for all remains a national challenge. The National Rural Health Mission has stimulated creation of public healthcare infrastructure. To correspondingly augment the availability of human resources, many measures like establishment of more medical, nursing and para-medical institutions in under-served areas, creation of additional seats for specialists and super-specialists, and incentivising service by doctors in rural areas, have been initiated. Early indications reflect the positive impact of this mission.

57. My government responded with alacrity to the Influenza A H1N1 pandemic. More than one crore inbound passengers were screened at international airports. New H1N1 testing laboratories were set-up, two crore doses of drugs were distributed to States free of cost, and 15 lakh doses of vaccines have been imported for health workers. For the first time in our country an indigenous Influenza A H1N1 vaccine is being developed which will be available this year.

58. My government has undertaken a number of steps to unearth unaccounted money parked outside India. These include amendment of the Income-tax Act, 1961 to enable the Central Government to enter into tax agreements with non-sovereign jurisdictions. Steps have already been initiated for negotiations for entering into Agreements for the Exchange of Information with major jurisdictions. Renegotiation of the Tax Treaty with Switzerland is in process. India is an active part of the global efforts to facilitate exchange of tax information, and to take action against tax evasion.

59. Access to news and entertainment must be made affordable and universal. To this end, in addition to notifying guidelines for providing Headend in the Sky services, the digitalization of both All India Radio and Doordarshan is on the anvil. The Commonwealth Games 2010 will be covered in High Definition format by Doordarshan for the first time. We also take pride that Indian films and music compositions have got international acclaim and recognition for our artists.

60. The Unique Identification Authority of India has been established with a mandate to issue unique identity numbers based on biometrics to all residents of India. This mammoth and unprecedented exercise will serve as a great enabler to improve targeting and delivery of major government welfare programmes and public services, especially to those who are poor and marginalized. The first set of unique identity numbers is expected to be issued in the early part of 2011.

61. A Delivery Monitoring Unit (DMU) has been established in the Prime Minister's Office to review a select number of flagship programmes and other initiatives. The nodal ministries concerned have begun publishing DMU reports on their websites on a quarterly basis, to keep the nation informed of their progress.

62. Government is committed to creating an innovation strategy for government, industry, entrepreneurs, technologists and academicians with a focus on inclusive growth and appropriate eco-system necessary to bring about generational change in our approach to development.

63. The country is hosting the prestigious 19th Commonwealth Games in October, 2010. Preparations for the event are at an advanced stage. Every effort will be made to ensure a befitting and successful conduct of the Games.

Honourable Members,

64. We have played our role in global affairs with responsibility and in the pursuit of peace, stability and progress in our region and beyond. Government will continue its active engagement with the world based upon the principles laid down by our founding fathers, and with the objective of furthering our goals of rapid and inclusive economic development and poverty alleviation in an increasingly interdependent world.

65. The visits to India by the King of Bhutan and the Prime Minister of Bhutan, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, the President of Maldives, and the President and the Prime Minister of Nepal have given new content to our traditional ties of friendship with neighbouring countries. Following the elections in Sri Lanka, we will continue to work with the Government to enhance our partnership. India will contribute to the humanitarian and rehabilitation efforts for the Tamil minority and long term re-construction in conflict-affected areas. India's assistance to the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan witnessed important milestones and we will continue to partner Afghanistan in its development efforts. India is ready to explore a meaningful relationship with Pakistan if Pakistan seriously addresses the threat of terrorism and takes effective steps to prevent terrorist activities against India.

66. Our relations with the major powers have been further consolidated. The Prime Minister's visit to the USA laid the framework for the further expansion of the India-US partnership at the bilateral, regional and global level. My visit to Russia and the visit by the Prime Minister have renewed our time-tested friendship and opened new areas of cooperation. The 10th India - European Union Summit held in New Delhi was a milestone in our widening partnership with Europe. Our Strategic and Cooperative Partnership with China progressively acquired greater regional and global content. The visit of the Prime Minister of Japan underlined our mutual

desire to accelerate our cooperation in all areas. The Prime Minister attended the first ever stand-alone summit of the BRIC countries.

67. My government pursued its 'Look East' policy with vigour. The President of the Republic of Korea was our honoured Chief Guest at the Republic Day celebrations. Government hosted the President of Mongolia, and the Prime Ministers of Australia and Malaysia. The signing of the India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement and the launching of several new initiatives within the India-ASEAN framework and the East Asia Summit process will further integrate India into the Asia-Pacific region.

68. My visit to Tajikistan, and the Prime Minister's presence for the first time at the Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation were a reflection of government's policy to strengthen the bridges of friendship and understanding with Central Asia. Relations with Turkey were strengthened following the visit of the President of Turkey.

69. The Prime Minister's participation in the Non-aligned Summit in Egypt further consolidated our relations with the developing world. We will continue to accord special attention to the countries of the Gulf and West Asia. India's steadfast support to the Palestinian cause was reiterated during the visit of the President of the Palestinian National Authority. The visit of the President of Namibia, and the visit by our Vice President to Botswana, Malawi, and Zambia carried forward our deepening engagement with the continent of Africa. We will build upon our steadily expanding cooperation with Latin America.

70. India's views on global challenges such as terrorism, energy and food security, climate change and the international financial and economic crisis were unambiguously articulated at the appropriate fora. The issue of reform of institutions of global governance was brought to the fore of the international agenda. India's voice was heard with respect in the G-20 process, the G-8 plus G-5 Summit, and the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.

71. We can take justifiable pride in the contributions made by the overseas Indian community in all walks of life across the globe which have earned them high respect. The first meeting of the Prime Minister's Global Advisory Council of Overseas Indians was held this year. Government will work towards giving Indian citizens living abroad the opportunity to vote by the time of the next regular general elections. We are committed to the security and welfare of the Indian diaspora. An Indian Community Welfare Fund has been established.

72. As part of the ambitious expansion of the country's nuclear energy programme, approval was accorded for the construction of additional Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors and sites for setting up Light Water Reactors. Following the availability of imported fuel as a result of the opening of international civil nuclear cooperation, commercial production has commenced in two units of the Rajasthan Atomic Power Project, and one more unit is expected to begin commercial production soon. New agreements for cooperation in the field of civil nuclear energy were concluded with Russia, Mongolia, Namibia, Argentina and the United Kingdom, while others are under negotiation.

73. The space programme continued to provide societal services to the Nation in the areas of tele-medicine, tele-education and village resource centres. The Oceansat-2 satellite was

successfully launched onboard the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle. The flight test of the GSLV-D3 launch vehicle with indigenous cryogenic stage, and the launch of the Cartosat-2B, INSAT-3D and Resourcesat-2 satellites are planned in the near future. The GSLV-Mark III launch vehicle will be further developed and activities towards the Chandrayaan-2 Mission will be initiated.

Honourable Members,

74. Our country stands at a historic turning point. Never before were we so close as we are today to realizing our national aspirations as envisioned by our founding fathers and spelt out by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in this very hall on the midnight of 14th August 1947:

"The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means ending poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity."

We have taken decisive strides towards reaching these goals. Still, much remains to be done. The road is long, but our journey is in progress. Let us march together with confidence to a new, bright future.

Jai Hind.

JAI HIND.