

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI
PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE LAUNCH OF THE
INFORMATION, EDUCATION & COMMUNICATION (IEC)
CAMPAIGN AGAINST MALNUTRITION
Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi : 19-11-2012**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It gives me great satisfaction to launch the INFORMATION, EDUCATION & COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN against malnutrition. I thank the previous speakers for a comprehensive introduction to the various aspects of this drive being taken up by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
2. The birth anniversary today, of late Prime Minister Shrimati Indira Gandhi, is an apt occasion for commencing this campaign. It is a tribute to her vision and leadership in prioritizing, through various Government programmes and policies, the numerous issues relating to the welfare of women and children in India. On malnutrition, she had remarked, "*There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread.*"
3. The launch of the 'IEC Campaign against Malnutrition' today is an important and timely initiative. It is a matter of concern that every third woman in our country is undernourished and every second woman is anaemic. The inter-generational

cycle of malnutrition is continuously perpetuated, with a high incidence of low birth weight - about 22 %, and greater susceptibility of infants to infection, growth failure and anaemia. Two out of five children - that is 42.5 % of children under five years in India are underweight. This is disturbing - and ironical - at a time when the Indian economy is on a strong positive growth trajectory. This anomaly is indefensible at a time when we are making rapid strides in agricultural production, biotechnology and research and development not only in agricultural sciences but also in health and medical sciences. These figures are a wake-up call. They underline the need for a concerted drive against malnutrition. Until we can ensure good nutrition and health for our children and their mothers we cannot achieve our targets of sustained and inclusive growth. Utmost priority must be accorded to prevent malnutrition - as early as possible and across the life cycle, to avert irreversible cumulative deficits in the growth and development of our young.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. The factors of malnutrition in India are complex: they include household food insecurity, illiteracy, poor environmental conditions, lack of awareness - especially among women, inadequate access to health services, safe drinking water and sanitation,

and inadequate purchasing power - among a host of reasons. Early marriage and ignorance about nutritional needs of infants also trigger a series of causative factors. Clearly, a vibrant societal awareness and collective efforts of Government, complemented by grass-roots organizations is the route to preventing maternal and child malnutrition.

5. At present, there is a convergence of major Government of India programmes which duly target malnutrition in women and children. The approach in dealing with the nutrition challenge is at two levels: firstly, the multi-sectoral, indirect approach for accelerated action on the determinants of malnutrition in all nutrition-related sectors. Secondly, direct and targeted interventions for specific vulnerable groups, such as children under six years, pregnant and nursing mothers as well as adolescent girls.
6. There are a number of national programmes directly or indirectly contributing to improved nutrition outcomes. Apart from the Integrated Child Development Services, these include the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls, the Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana, National Rural Health Mission, Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan, National Rural Drinking Water Programme, Mid Day Meals Scheme, Targeted Public Distribution

System, National Food Security Mission, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and the National Rural Livelihood Mission among others. This campaign will contribute in a significant way and give an impetus to these ongoing schemes. I note that the campaign has evolved through a consultative process involving concerned stake-holders. I understand that it will be executed in four stages to systematically inform and advise the target populations and anchor their responses in fighting malnutrition.

7. I am told that Shri Aamir Khan has given probono services for the campaign and UNICEF has given technical support to the programme. I recognize their valuable contribution - and that of all the participants who have given their time and energy to develop the campaign.
8. Creating increased public awareness of the different dimensions of malnutrition is a key requirement for the success of such a campaign. The mobilisation of public support is a critical requirement for preventing malnutrition through early action. I expect that this campaign will create an enabling social and media environment that enables families and communities to understand the malnutrition challenge very clearly – and to take informed collective action, to address it. Positive family care

practices need to be promoted – especially those related to maternal care, child feeding, psycho-social care, health, hygiene, and importantly, care of girls and women. Community awareness would further motivate effective utilization of child care and health services and encourage communities to identify with and supplement Government efforts.

9. I am happy to note that the launch of the campaign has coincided with the government's approval of Strengthening and Restructuring of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). This will impact directly and positively the lives of nearly 8 crore young children under 6 years of age and 1.8 crore pregnant and lactating mothers in 13.2 lakh habitations across our country- reaching the most vulnerable and deprived. I recall that it was the determination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi that resulted in this programme being launched in 33 community development blocks in 1975 to become today the world's largest and most unique programme for integrated early childhood development.
10. In the Twelfth Plan – ICDS emerges as a powerful instrument for more inclusive growth relying on the Anganwadi centre as the first outpost of health, nutrition, early learning and convergence of key services at the community level. Our Anganwadi

Workers and Anganwadi Helpers, some of whom I see gathered here today – can very effectively promote this campaign.

11. I am confident that the IEC campaign will result in effective social mobilization, programme implementation and a scaling up of synergies and intersectoral convergences.
12. I congratulate the Ministry of Women and Child Development who have undertaken the campaign in pursuance of the initiative of the National Council on India's Nutrition Challenges led by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh.
13. I congratulate Smt. Krishna Tirathji, Minister, Women and Child Development, her Team and the network of field functionaries for taking this initiative to mothers, children and communities in the different parts of our country.
14. With these words, I have the pleasure to launch the IEC campaign against malnutrition and extend to all those involved in its implementation my best wishes for its success.

JAI HIND