

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT  
FOURTH NATIONAL VOTERS' DAY ORGANIZED  
BY THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA**

Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi: January 25, 2014

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1. I am indeed happy and appreciative of Chief Election Commissioner and his colleagues for inviting me on the fourth National Voters' Day to share some of my perceptions with this very distinguished audience. Just 64 years ago, on this very day, the founding fathers of our Constitution gave our country this unique organization to organize and supervise elections.
2. I need to hardly emphasize the importance of the Voters' Day for the nation. It re-affirms the power of the people to determine their own destiny by exercising the freedom to elect their own representatives. To ensure that the Election Commission retains its independence and status, the constitution itself vide Article 324 gives it the powers of "*superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to Parliament and to the Legislature of every State and of elections to the offices of President and Vice-President*". It is, therefore, an organization that has immense responsibilities and whose efficient functioning has a singular bearing on the quality of democracy in the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

3. We all can be proud that India is the world's largest functional democracy. With the independence that we gained in 1947, we were able to successfully build a free democratic country. Since then, we have built on the democratic foundations. A large number of nations that gained freedom around the same time also adopted democratic systems of governance, but India is one of the very few nations that has been able to strengthen its democratic ethos. In comparison, unfortunately many nations degenerated into autocratic rule while India overcame many challenges and built the democratic edifice that is in many ways unparalleled.
4. Our representative bodies embody the hopes and aspirations of the people while at the same time also serving as a platform to echo their grievances.

5. It is in these bodies that the people repose their faith to advance their common agenda of growth and social advancement. While their responsiveness to public needs is assessed by the people on a continual basis, they are called to account through the medium of elections.
6. It is only by the conduct of free, fair and participative elections that our democracy has become in many ways, the most vibrant in the world.
7. The role of the Election Commission in this success has been simply outstanding. The challenges it has had to face have been daunting. The management of an electorate of over 716 million in 2009, that is nearly the combined population of third, fourth and fifth largest nations in the world, and over eight lakh thirty thousand polling stations is not an easy job. The Election Commission of India deserves our appreciation for delivering to the citizens of this country, a system that ensures transparent, free and fair elections. Its role in promoting democracy has been so efficient that it has gained global recognition as a model worthy of emulation. I compliment the Election Commission for this laudable achievement.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

8. Enthusiastic participation of people in the electoral process is the key to healthy democracy. The Voter is, therefore, the central actor in any democratic election. I am happy to note that the Election Commission of India has taken initiatives to make the process of enrolment easier and convenient, and the voting experience people-friendly.
9. It is heartening to know that civil society organizations, the corporate sector, educational institutions, the media and many others have joined the Election Commission in this shared goal. I am happy to see a growing excitement among the electorate to eagerly participate in elections. The Election Commission has to not only sustain this consciousness but also strengthen it further.

10. I have also been informed that the National Voters' Day organized by the Election Commission is a part of the ongoing effort to bring every eligible citizen on the electoral roll. The focus of this drive is on the newly eligible voters in the age group of 18-19 years. I am told that during the last National Voters' Day, around 2.82 crore new voters were registered across the country, out of which 93 lakh were new voters. I am confident that the numbers will be even higher this year. Once again, I congratulate the Election Commission for undertaking the massive exercise in the earnest attempts to ensure that every eligible citizen is included in the electoral roll.
11. The efforts of the Commission have indeed borne good results. It is evident in the increase in the number of voters from about 76 crore in 2012 to close to 79 crore in 2013. Due to the concerted efforts, the National Voters' Day has captured the imagination of the country, especially the youth, in a short span of time.
12. I congratulate all the young voters of Delhi, who have just received their Voter Identity Cards. I also compliment the millions of other young voters across the country, who have been similarly empowered today. Let me remind you that you now have the power to choose your representatives. Do exercise this power and do exercise it responsibly. I hope all of you will use this opportunity and exercise your franchise every time in the most informed and ethical manner, free of any inducement and going beyond narrow considerations.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

13. I am glad to have the privilege to also recognize the outstanding officers from the field, who have been bestowed the National Awards for best electoral practices. I congratulate all of you for your invaluable contribution in efficiently managing elections, improving voter registration, enhancing voters' participation, educating and motivating voters, fighting black-money and paid news during elections, and ensuring a conducive environment for people to cast their vote. Always bear in mind that you and the lakhs of other personnel engaged in elections management have the most crucial pivotal role in reinforcing the grids of Indian democracy.

14. To conclude, I would like to once again call upon all eligible citizens to register as voters and vote with pride in every election. It is your fundamental right and please exercise it. Through increased participation, the electoral process and democracy in India will continue to grow in strength and vibrancy. I once again compliment the Election Commission of India for all its achievements and wish them the very best for the coming years.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.

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