

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE TO THE MEMBERS OF KERALA LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY**

Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala: 30-10-2012

It is a great privilege and honour to be here with you today and be part of the celebrations of 125 years of 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 all of you.

2. I understand that three of my eminent predecessors Sri. K.R Narayanan, Dr. A P. J. Abdul Kalam and Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil 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 Mahatma Gandhiji, Pandit Jawharlal Nehru and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in front of the Assembly Complex is testimony to 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 Legislature 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 it also has a newly built section that showcases the history of

Kerala's democratic institutions with the help of state-of the-art technology. I am also happy to know that the State Legislature has set up a Training Cell for imparting education in parliamentary practices and procedures to the legislators.

3. 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.

4. Friends, you are privileged to be the members of one of the oldest representative bodies in our country. You are torch-bearers 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, becoming among the first native states of India to do so.

5. 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 Assembly are amongst the best examples of the use of democratic institutions in bringing socio-economic and political transformation. The fruits of these legislation 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 politics 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.

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

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. An important contribution of Kerala in the legislative sphere has also been the system of Subject Committees which has since been adapted into the Parliamentary Standing Committees at the Central level. 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 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.

10. 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 other state legislatures in this regard, there is considerable scope for further improvement. The Presiding Officers Conferences have time and again reiterated the need for holding a minimum of 100 days of sittings every year. I appeal to the Legislators to strive and do their best in this regard. Kerala is proud of its achieving 100% literacy. I hope the Legislators of this Assembly will take up 100 days of sittings as a similar challenge and strive to achieve this goal.

11. Friends, being a representative of the people is a matter of privilege and a great honour. This privilege however carries with it 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 a 24/7 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 Legislature and act as the link between the people and the Government.

12. 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 change. The primary responsibility of State Legislature is to enact laws required for good governance and administration of the State. List-2 of the Seventh Schedule of our Constitution lists 66 items for State administration and legislation.

13. 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 Legislature, no tax can be levied except by a law passed by the Legislature and no money can be withdrawn from the Consolidated Fund of the State without the approval of the Legislature. With the heightened complexity of administration and legislation, Legislators must ensure adequate discussion and scrutiny before passing of legislation. It is sad that across the country, time devoted by legislators towards legislation has been gradually declining.

14. 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 severally 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. Moreover, most of the instruments of governance are executed through appropriate laws passed by 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 it by the Constitution to keep the wheels of our democratic functioning moving smoothly.

15. 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 parliamentary devices. The cardinal principle of effective functioning of 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 rules framed by Legislatures themselves. The minority has to accept the decisions of the majority while the majority has to respect the views of the minority. 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 manifesto and policies. However, there are a large number of issues of development and public welfare, which transcend all political barriers. The entire Assembly must work jointly for the benefit of the people, the State and the country.

16. Pt. 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 cooperation, of self-discipline, of self-restraint. It is obvious that a House like this cannot perform any functions without a spirit of cooperation, without a large measure of restraint and self-discipline in each group”.

17. 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 opportunities for participating effectively in the proceedings. But

remember that even to avail that limited opportunity the House has to function.

18. 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 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.

19. There is need for collective thinking by 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 post-approval scrutiny of budgetary allocations made to various Ministries.

20. 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 and common goal.

21. As Nobel laureate 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.

22. 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 its 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 newspapers and periodicals. It is home to rich and vibrant literary, theatrical and cinematal culture as well as enterprising and socially conscious people.

23. 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 time 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 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 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.

24. 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 to also 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 leadership in this regard.

25. 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 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".

26. 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.