

ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT—23 MARCH 1971

Lok Sabha	—	Fifth Lok Sabha
Session	—	First Session after the 5th General Election
President of India	—	Shri V.V. Giri
Vice-President of India	—	Shri Gopal Swarup Pathak
Prime Minister of India	—	Smt. Indira Gandhi
Speaker, Lok Sabha	—	Dr. G.S. Dhillon

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT,

It gives me pleasure to address this Joint Session of the Fifth Parliament of our Republic and summon you to new endeavours.

The General Election has once again demonstrated that durable political power in a democracy has only one source—the people. It has proved the people's confidence in themselves and their faith in the process of democracy.

Our people have made their choice. They have asserted their sovereignty through the ballot box. And theirs is a massive mandate for change/peaceful change that must swiftly and visibly alter the picture of poverty and alienation in our land.

We have begun this work. But now we have to address ourselves afresh to evolving perspectives, policies and practices even more closely and concretely related to the needs of our people and our times.

My Government have been returned to office on the clear pledge that the central objective of our policy must be the abolition of poverty. To achieve this, my Government are firmly committed to implementing the economic and social transformation outlined in the manifesto which has received such overwhelming support of the electorate.

The Government will soon frame specific policies and programmes arising out of the mandate of the electorate. A mid term appraisal of the Fourth Plan will be made. This appraisal will enable us to review and reorient the plan in order to increase the pace and effective use of investment in the economy. As part of this exercise, Government will also identify the specific

directions in which developmental programmes could be further reinforced in a determined effort to deal with the problem of unemployment. The Crash Scheme for Rural Employment which is to be implemented from the commencement of the next financial year will form the nucleus of a comprehensive programme for the expansion of employment. This programme will be linked to schemes for raising the productivity of agriculture. The construction and renovation of minor irrigation sources and the provision of basic amenities such as drinking water supply and link roads will form part of this programme. The problem of the educated unemployed will receive special attention.

My Government are convinced that land reforms are vital for the promotion of an egalitarian social order and for maximising agricultural production. In recent months, various issues relating to land reforms have received special attention of my Government. A Central Land Reforms Committee under the chairmanship of the Union Minister of Food and Agriculture has been set up. As a result of the lead provided by the Government of India, States in which intermediary tenures have not been completely abolished have taken steps to do so. Further legislation has been introduced in some States to give security of tenure, to reduce rents and ceilings and to restrict exemptions.

While recognising that land reforms come within the legislative competence of the States, my Government will continue to press the State Governments for further action in promoting a more equitable agrarian structure. Simultaneously the Government will pursue the objective of imposing a ceiling on urban property.

Extension of credit facilities for productive purposes to areas and classes hitherto neglected is one of the important objectives of my Government. A comprehensive credit guarantee scheme has been launched recently. A Credit Guarantee Corporation has been set up under the auspices of the Reserve Bank of India. As from 1st April, 1971, small loans given by commercial and cooperative bank offices will be eligible for guarantee by the Corporation to the extent of about 75 per cent of the loans advanced. The increasing attention paid by the banks to the genuine needs of productive enterprises, including those of agriculturists whose main resort earlier was to money-lenders, is one of the striking new developments which have served to concretise the benefits of nationalisation for the small man.

Government also attach high priority to the extension of electricity to rural areas and, in particular, to the utilisation of electricity for lift irrigation. The implementation of rural electrification programmes has been appreciably accelerated; 2.66 lakh pump sets were energised in the first year of the Plan and this tempo has been stepped up in the current year. The Rural Electrification Corporation has begun well with the sanction of schemes of the value of about Rs. 70 crore. This programme will be pursued with increasing vigour.

My Government are keenly aware of the intolerable living conditions of the urban poor. The cleanliness and improvement of slums and rehabilitation of slum dwellers will figure prominently in the agenda of economic and social reforms which my Government have in view and larger resources will be channelised for this purpose. The Housing and Urban Development Finance channelised has been set up recently and will become an important agency for the augmentation of housing facilities in metropolitan centres and urban areas.

Simultaneously, efforts to improve rural housing conditions will be given fuller consideration. The aim is to allot building sites to landless workers on a larger scale, to legislate for the conferment of homestead rights and to assist in the construction of decent, liveable houses for the rural population. This will necessarily have to be a joint programme of the State and Central Governments.

My Government also propose to:—

- (a) appoint task forces to remove obstacles that come in the way of the speedy implementation of investment programmes in the public and private sectors of our industry and to step up the rate of industrial production;
- (b) extend the new technology in agriculture to dry farming, to new crops and to new areas which have not been covered so far. Research and extension programmes for a faster growth in the output of fibres and oilseeds which are articles of mass consumption will be intensified;
- (c) consult leaders of trade unions and managements in order to evolve sound industrial relations and to secure increased productivity consistent with a fair deal for labour. Improvement in industrial relations is as vital as capital and technology for increasing output;
- (d) accelerate changes in the structure and functioning of administrative apparatus, expedite decision making, ensure effective delegation of powers and responsibilities and streamline financial procedures; and
- (e) devote special attention to building up a well-equipped managerial cadre for the public and private sectors.

The economy recorded growth almost, at the planned rate in 1969-70, and it is likely to repeat this performance in the current year. A good harvest for the fourth year in succession is expected, raising the foodgrain output to 105 million tonnes—5.5 million tonnes more than that of last year. The wheat revolution is by now an accomplished fact. Our agricultural scientists have released a number of higher yielding varieties of rice. The response of farmers to the new technology is limited only by our capacity to reach them effectively.

However, the improvement in the food situation will at best be a reprieve. The results of the new Census will be a grave reminder that the Family Planning Programme has to be pushed forward with much greater vigour. This programme can only be fulfilled if it becomes a movement. The small family must speedily become the accepted social norm. Indeed family planning should be regarded as a vital element in the gigantic task of social transformation that lies ahead.

While the general outlook for the economy is hopeful, my Government are aware that the level of prices in recent months has caused some concern. The wholesale price index is now approximately 3.4 per cent higher than the level about a year ago. But it is important to note that amidst this pressure on prices the foodgrain prices have declined by about 6.5 per cent. The Government have therefore sought to keep the rise in prices in check by arranging larger imports of commodities in short supply while taking steps to increase their internal production.

My Government intend to draw up and execute a National plan for the application of Science and Technology to development. This plan will be intimately related to and indeed largely derived from our socio-economic plan. An important feature of such a plan will be the preparation of detailed programmes in a few high priority areas of national endeavour in which science and technology play an important part.

The Government have set up an Electronics Commission to ensure balanced development of the electronics industry. The Commission will concern itself with research, development and industrial operations in the field of electronics.

My Government are anxious that rapid economic development should not lead to the pollution of air, water and soil. There should be rational management of our natural resources taking care not to upset the ecological balance in nature.

The persistence of communal tension in some parts of the country and the occasional flaring up of violence constitute a threat to our secularism and democracy and to the basic values of civilised life which we cherish. The Government are determined to overcome this danger. This problem needs to be treated as national task to ensure national survival.

In the recent past, violence has grown in West Bengal. The murder of Shri Hemanta Kumar Basu, one of our oldest and most dedicated colleagues in the freedom movement, and of other political workers has shocked us all. Nevertheless the conduct and results of the recent elections in West Bengal clearly indicate a reaffirmation by the people of their faith in democracy.

My Government reiterate their unqualified determination to root out lawlessness and to eliminate the 'politics' of murder and assault. Simultaneously my Government intend to accelerate the programme for the improvement of Greater Calcutta* with the help of public and private investment. The Calcutta* Metropolitan Development Authority has begun its work. The Industrial Reconstruction Corporation is about to be launched. Other development works are also being undertaken in West Bengal.

The West Bengal Land Reforms (Amendment) Act was passed in July 1970 whereby the Bargadar's share of the crop was increased and his right to cultivate land made secure and heritable. A Presidential Act has been enacted recently to reduce the ceiling and fix it in terms of the family as a unit.

You are aware that orders for the derecognition of the Rulers of former Indian States were declared inoperative by a majority judgement of the Supreme Court. However Government's resolve to abolish by appropriate constitutional measures the Privy purses and privileges of Rulers remains unaltered.

Hope and despair continue to co-exist in the larger world around us. There has been a relaxation of tensions between Western and Eastern Europe. We welcome the signing of the agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Governments of the U.S.S.R. and Poland. But the situation in South-East Asia and West Asia has worsened.

The situation in Indo-China has deteriorated further. Ever widening areas are engulfed in war embracing Cambodia and Laos. This is inconsistent with the interests of peace. We have urged restraint and pressed our view that the only solution lies in a peaceful and negotiated settlement within the broad framework of the Geneva Accord. It is our belief that the best solution will be an international Agreement or Convention, signed by all the Great Powers and others interested in the region.

There is uneasy truce in West Asia. My Government hope that positive response would be made to the series of initiatives recently taken by the U.A.R. showing its earnest desire to implement the Resolution of the Security Council of November 22, 1967.

We are concerned at the setting up of military bases by outside powers in the Indian Ocean and the proposed sale of arms to South Africa. As mentioned in the Lusaka Declaration, we should like the Indian Ocean area to be a zone of peace, free from military confrontation and the rivalries of Great Powers.

The attitude of the Government of Pakistan during the recent hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane and its eventual destruction was deeply resented by the Government and the people of India. Friendship and understanding which we seek cannot be achieved by such provocations.

* Now known as Kolkata.

My Government will steadfastly pursue its policy, of non-alignment. It will raise its voice whenever peace is threatened, wherever the independence of sovereign nations is eroded. It stands firmly against colonialism whether in its old shape or in any new guise.

Your present session will be a short one confined to the transaction of essential financial and budgetary business. You will be meeting again shortly to consider further business. A statement of the estimated receipts and expenditure of the Government of India for the financial year 1971-72 will be laid before you. Bills will also be introduced for replacing the State of Himachal Pradesh (Amendment) Ordinance, 1971, and the Labour Provident Fund Laws (Amendment) Ordinance, 1971. A Bill for continuing the Imports and Exports (Control) Act, 1947 will also be introduced in the current session of Parliament.

Honourable Members, the people of India have given their verdict in unmistakable terms. With that verdict the period of political uncertainty and of the politics of manoeuvre ends. After the din of the election battle, we must bend ourselves to the service of our people. We can take pride that political democracy and parliamentary institutions have grown and have taken deep roots in the hearts and minds of our people. We must serve the cause of democracy by respecting the will of the people.

The massive majority given to my Government is only the first step on the long and difficult road ahead. To achieve victory in the war against poverty and social injustice requires the sustained and dedicated efforts of millions of our people. I am confident that Members of Parliament and the people of India as a whole, will respond, in abundant measure, to the challenge of our times.