

ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT—28 MARCH 1977

Lok Sabha	—	Sixth Lok Sabha
Session	—	First Session after the 6th General Election
President of India	—	Shri B. D. Jatti (Acting)*
Vice-President of India	—	Shri B. D. Jatti
Prime Minister of India	—	Shri Morarji Desai
Speaker, Lok Sabha	—	Dr. N. Sanjiva Reddy

HONOURABLE MEMBERS,

I extend my felicitations to the members of the new Lok Sabha and welcome you all to the joint session of the Sixth Parliament.

On this occasion when we miss his benign and familiar presence my thoughts go to our late President Shri Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed in whom we have lost an elder statesman, a wise counsellor, an experienced leader, and a perfect gentleman. We mourn his loss today and convey our sincere and heart-felt condolences to Begum Abida Ahmed.

The General Election just concluded has effectively and decisively demonstrated the power of the people, the vitality of the democratic process in India and the deep root that it has taken. The people have given a clear verdict in favour of individual freedom, democracy and the rule of law and against executive arbitrariness, the emergence of a personality cult and extra-constitutional centres of power. The election marks an important milestone in the evolution of our democratic polity into a healthy two-party system.

My Government pledges itself to fulfil in every way the mandate given to it by the people. In doing so, it will not take the people for granted or assume that they know nothing and that the government alone knows all answers and solutions. The traumatic experience of the last two years during which many atrocities were committed on the people and they had to undergo untold sufferings and some have even died, has brought home the relevance of this.

*Shri B.D. Jatti, Vice President—acting as President of India.

Hon'ble Members, the new Government has taken charge only three days ago. It has not had the time to work out the details of the various measures it intends to adopt. This will be done in due course during the year and placed before you. Nevertheless, there are some urgent tasks to be attended to and the Government will take them in hand immediately.

The most urgent task is to remove the remaining curbs on the fundamental freedoms and civil rights of the people, to restore the rule of law and the right of free expression to the Press. The external emergency proclaimed in 1971 has been revoked by me yesterday. The Government will also take the following measures:

- (i) Having regard to the gross abuse to which the Maintenance of Internal Security Act has been put during the last two years, a thorough review of the Act will be undertaken with a view to repealing it and examining whether the existing laws need further strengthening to deal with economic offences and security of the country without denying the right of approach to courts.
- (ii) Legislation will be introduced to ensure that no political or social organisation is banned except on adequate grounds and after an independent judicial enquiry.
- (iii) The Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matters Act will be repealed. Immunity which the Press enjoyed in reporting the proceedings of legislatures will be restored.
- (iv) The amendment to the Representation of Peoples Act which redefined corrupt practices and afforded protection to electoral offences by certain individuals by placing them beyond the scrutiny of the courts, will be repealed.

During the course of the year, a comprehensive measure will be placed before you to amend the Constitution to restore balance between the people and Parliament, Parliament and the Judiciary, the Judiciary and the Executive, the States and the Centre, the citizen and the Government, that the founding fathers of our Constitution had worked out. This will include provisions to amend Article 352 to prevent the abuse of the power to declare emergency and of the relevant Articles to ensure that President's Rule is imposed strictly in accordance with the objectives mentioned in the Constitution and not for extraneous purposes.

One of the very serious developments in the recent past was the erosion of the freedom and impartiality of the media of publicity and information. My Government will take steps to restore to the media their due place in a democracy. Steps will also be taken to ensure that All India Radio, Doordarshan, Films Division and other Government media function in a fair and objective manner.

Nothing has roused public anger and resentment so much as the manner in which the family planning programme was implemented last year in several parts of the country. This has caused a major set-back to the programme which is vital for the welfare of the nation. Family planning will be pursued vigorously as a wholly voluntary programme and as an integral part of a comprehensive policy covering education, health, maternity and child-care, family welfare, women's rights and nutrition.

In the economic sphere, the Government is pledged to the removal of destitution within a definite time-frame of 10 years. Relative neglect of the rural sector has created a dangerous imbalance in the economy leading to migration of people from rural areas to urban centres. The farmer has been denied reasonable and fair price for his products. Allocations for agriculture and related developments have been grossly inadequate and the need to improve conditions in the villages has received scarce attention. More than a lakh of villages do not even have the most elementary facilities for drinking water. My Government will follow an employment-oriented strategy in which primacy will be given to the development of agriculture, agro-industries, small and cottage industries especially in rural areas. High priority will also be given to the provisions of minimum needs in rural areas and to integrated rural development. To the extent possible at this point of time, the Fifth Five Year Plan will be reviewed. The planning process will be revitalised and work on the Sixth Five Year Plan will be taken up without delay. My Government will announce at the time of the presentation of the final budget later this year the details of the economic programme that is proposed to be followed.

I now come to external relations. My Government will honour all the commitments made by the previous Government. It stands for friendship with all our neighbours and other nations of the world on the basis of equality and reciprocity and will follow a path of genuine non-alignment. I am glad to say that my Government will be hosting a meeting of the Non-aligned Co-ordinating Bureau early next month. My Government will also give very special attention to the strengthening of ties and economic and technical co-operation with all developing nations.

Hon'ble Members, your present session will be a short one in which you will have to attend to urgent financial business—the Supplementary Demands of the Union and the States under President's Rule, and the Vote on Account regarding the General Budget, the Railway Budget and the budgets of States under President's Rule. A heavy and busy schedule lies ahead of you in the coming months. There is today a mood of expectancy in the country and I trust that you will co-operate fully in attending to the business that will be placed before you by Government, with thoroughness and expedition. I commend you to your tasks and wish you all success.

Jai Hind.