

ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT—20 DECEMBER 1989

Lok Sabha	—	Ninth Lok Sabha
Session	—	First Session after the 9th General Election
President of India	—	Shri R. Venkataraman
Vice-President of India	—	Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma
Prime Minister of India	—	Shri Vishwanath Pratap Singh
Speaker, Lok Sabha	—	Shri Rabi Ray

HONOURABLE MEMBERS,

It gives me great pleasure to address both Houses of Parliament at this first session after the Ninth General Election to the House of the People. I extend my felicitations to the members of the new Lok Sabha.

The General Election, just concluded, has demonstrated the maturity of the Indian electorate. The people have given a clear verdict in favour of change.

The Government took charge just a fortnight ago and has commenced in right earnest the task of working out the details of various policy initiatives and thrusts which it intends to adopt. In this Address I am confining myself to the broad issues that the Government proposes to tackle.

My Government pledges itself to fulfil the mandate given to it by the people. The Government will work to restore the dignity of the nation and of the individual. The Government proposes to adopt an alternative model of governance and development based on socialist ideals of economic equality and social justice, federalism and decentralisation, institutional accountability and human rights. Government will take steps to establish an Inter-State Council and to accord constitutional status to the Planning Commission.

My Government is committed to a process of national reconciliation and the evolution of consensus to solve the many problems facing the nation.

The Punjab problem has defied solution so far. Over the past few years, we have witnessed widespread violence. There will be no compromise with

separatism and no yielding to extremists, but there is admittedly a compelling need for a national endeavour to resolve the problem. The Government will hold wide ranging discussions with leaders of cross-sections of the people to evolve a national consensus. A beginning has already been made in the All Party Meeting held on 17th December, 1989. Action on the report of the Ranganath Misra Commission of Enquiry will be expeditiously completed.

The situation in Jammu and Kashmir is extremely delicate and fraught with serious implications. There will be no compromise on the country's unity, sovereignty and integrity. The people of Jammu and Kashmir, who have been second to none in the nation's freedom struggle, will be enabled to play their rightful role in the process of national growth and development. The problems of the people of the state will be gone into in depth with a view to finding speedy and durable solutions.

The North-East region requires our immediate attention. We are committed to the speedy economic development of the region and for the settlement of the issues which concern the tribal peoples in the region, including Assam, through dialogue and discussion.

In recent months, the country has witnessed riots and violence arising from sectarian issues. A secular India is the very basis of our emotional unity and national integrity. Violence has no place in the land of Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence. The need of the hour is the generation of an atmosphere of amity and goodwill in order to avoid any communal divide. Government seeks the support of the people in its unrelenting efforts to promote national unity and integrity. The National Integration Council is being re-constituted and will function as forum for effective initiatives and interaction on issues of national concern.

A healthy and vibrant democracy hinges crucially on the sanctity and strength of democratic institutions. The Government is fully committed to the restoration of the dignity and vitality of institutions which have been weakened in recent years. Power flows from the people. It is imperative that the people themselves should have the final say in governing themselves. My Government will promote on the basis of national consensus a genuine devolution of powers, functions and resources to Panchayati Raj institutions enabling the fullest participation of the people in the developmental process. It will secure, with the cooperation of the states, adequate representation in these bodies for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes and women. Indeed the whole process will be one of strengthening the federal structure of the polity at the Centre, the State, the District and the Panchayat levels.

A clean public life is the bedrock of democracy. Over the past few years, there has been a growing erosion of norms and values in public life. The law will take its own course in respect of matters of corruption in high

places. The Government will introduce legislation during this session for setting up a Lok Pal, whose jurisdiction will include the Prime Minister also.

My Government firmly believes that a participative democracy requires an enlightened and informed electorate. It also believes that an open Government functioning in full public view, will minimise the possibility of wrong doing. The Official Secrets Act will be suitably amended so that people have increased access to information. Doordarshan and AIR will be given autonomy to ensure free flow of information. A Bill to this effect will be introduced in this session. The 59th Amendment to the Constitution which seriously jeopardised the citizen's right to life will be repealed. The Postal Bill which sought to interfere with the citizen's right to privacy will be withdrawn. Similarly, the amendments to the Commissions of Inquiry Act which sought to permit withholding of vital information from the people and Parliament will be removed from the Statute book. My Government will, by amending the Constitution, ensure the citizen's right to information.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes continue to be victims of social and economic injustice. Government's primary aim will be to ensure economic and social justice to them so that they can lead their lives with dignity and honour. The reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the legislatures will be extended by a further period of 10 years.

Government will take appropriate steps to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission.

The problems of ex-servicemen will receive full consideration particularly in regard to their demand for one-rank-one-pension and their post-retirement employment.

The Government will spare no efforts to guarantee that minorities live without fear and as equal partners in the country's progress.

The Constitution provides equal status to men and women. However, women continue to suffer from discrimination and indignity. My Government will take all steps to provide equal opportunities for women.

The youth have a special role to play in the progress of the country. Their vast energies have to be tapped and channelled for the task of nation building. They are the harbingers of change and it is they who have to lay the foundations of a new and just social order. Government will take steps to facilitate the harnessing of youth power for unleashing social forces to transform society. The educational system will be reformed so that it responds to the needs and aspirations of the new generation.

It will be the endeavour of this Government to ensure integration of the scientific and technological capabilities with our other efforts for national development. Science and Technology will be used for increasing agricultural

production, developing technologies that would lead to employment generation, for the proper utilisation of natural resources, and for generally benefiting the population at the grass roots level.

Government will give priority to the expansion of productive employment opportunities in the economy. It will strive to ensure appropriately to all citizens the right to work, to enable them to participate in the nation building process.

There are disquieting trends on the economic front. Unbridled government expenditure and consequent increase in money supply and proliferation of black money have stoked the fires of inflation. The fiscal imbalance has shown up in the form of a huge budgetary deficit. The balance of payments is under severe strain.

The Government attaches the highest priority to curbing inflationary pressures. In recent months, prices of many essential commodities have risen sharply. This has further impoverished the poor and the under privileged. Government intends to tackle the problem of inflation in all possible ways.

Deficit financing has reached staggering levels. Steps will be taken to reduce wasteful government expenditure. Effective control over Government spending and deficit is an essential prerequisite for restoring external and internal stability to our economy.

A number of medium-term factors have placed a strain on the balance of payments. Much more needs to be done by way of import management and export growth. The Government will formulate an Action Plan which will aim at correcting the imbalance in our external payments position.

The rise in prices of essential commodities has affected the common man adversely. The public distribution system will be strengthened and closely monitored, Production of articles of common consumption will be encouraged. These steps will ensure that such commodities are within the reach of the vulnerable sections of the society.

Poverty and unemployment continue to confront the nation. Economic disparities have increased in the past few years. All sections of the people have not shared equally the fruits of growth. Government is committed to redress this imbalance and redirect the benefits of development to the poorer sections of society. The Minimum Needs Programme, aimed at the poor, will be strengthened and in particular, Government will undertake a time-bound programme to provide all villages with potable drinking water.

The vast majority of our population live in the villages. There has been a flight of resources—both human and otherwise, from our rural areas. This trend has to be stopped. A substantial portion of Government's investment

outlay has to be channelled to rural areas. Government's policies will be designed for the poor and the toiling masses. The Government will take steps to see that the terms of trade for the agriculture sector are improved and our farmers receive remunerative prices for their produce. Government will take appropriate steps to provide debt relief for marginal farmers, landless agricultural labourers, artisans and weavers on loans below Rs. 10,000. My Government will revise the existing laws to bring about equitable distribution of land and other natural resources like water and make the tiller of the land its owner. All land reform laws, will be included in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution.

My Government will promote industrial development in such a way as to maximise employment. An important role will be assigned—and all support given—to small-scale industries, to agro processing industries and industries based on the craft of rural artisans as also village industries of particular benefit to women and rural households. The Public Sector will be streamlined so as to augment the surpluses generated so that they can be ploughed back for future expansion or utilisation for developmental activities. Labour participation in management will be made effective to promote an environment of productivity and industrial peace.

In order to prevent the degradation of environment and consequent erosion of our natural resource base, Government will make preservation of environment a priority area of State Policy. Programmes for regeneration of biomass will receive fullest emphasis.

My Government's foreign policy is deeply rooted in the ideals and principles which inspired the freedom struggle. This is reflected in its firm adherence to non-alignment and our struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racial discrimination and all forms of domination and exploitation. The rapidly changing international environment presents both challenges and opportunities for India, underlining the need for further strengthening the national consensus.

My Government attaches importance to revitalising and strengthening ties with our neighbours in South Asia, and to imparting fresh dynamism to the process of regional cooperation within the framework of SAARC. The Government will spare no effort to resolve outstanding bilateral issues with our neighbouring countries, consistent with our national interests. The Government will further endeavour to usher in an era of stability, confidence and cooperative endeavour in our region. In the pursuit of this objective talks have already been initiated with the Government of Sri Lanka.

The process of further understanding and cooperation between India and China will be continued by my Government. It is hoped that the boundary question can be resolved in a fair, reasonable manner in consonance with our national interests.

My Government will further strengthen the traditional friendship with the Soviet Union; build upon the new trends of a constructive and cooperative relationship with the United States; and strengthen economic cooperation with Japan and the European Community.

My Government recognises the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to achieve a homeland of their own in a peaceful West Asia. The Government's support and solidarity to this end will always be there. It will also be my Government's endeavour to maintain pressure on the Pretoria regime to commence early negotiations for the dismantlement of apartheid. The emergence of a united democratic and non-racial South Africa is our objective.

Honourable Members, the present session is a short one. Yet it is historic in its importance and is summoned immediately following the constitution of the Ninth Lok Sabha in order to place before Parliament the new agenda of work.

I wish you all success in your endeavours.

Jai Hind.