

ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT—24 FEBRUARY 1992

Lok Sabha	— Tenth Lok Sabha
Session	— First Session of the Year
President of India	— Shri R. Venkataraman
Vice-President of India	— Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma
Prime Minister of India	— Shri P. V. Narasimha Rao
Speaker, Lok Sabha	— Shri Shivraj V. Patil

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT,

I welcome you to this first session of Parliament in 1992 and wish you the very best for the successful completion of the budgetary and legislative business ahead. I extend a special welcome to the new members from Punjab.

The Government had given an assurance that elections would be held in Punjab in February, 1992. Despite many serious problems, this assurance has been fulfilled. Members are aware that the State of Punjab has been facing terrorist violence for past one decade and many innocent lives have been lost. The brave people of Punjab deserve to be congratulated for the courage they have displayed in re-affirming their faith in the democratic process and in the abiding values of secularism and nationhood. The Government is committed to finding a just and amicable solution to all the outstanding issues in Punjab. The Rajiv Longowal accord was a step in this direction. The presence of elected representatives will strengthen a meaningful dialogue and the participation in the process of all sections in the State.

The involvement of forces across the border in aiding, arming and providing logistic support to the terrorists in Kashmir is now well known. Pakistan has continued its massive propaganda and disinformation campaign to defame India and to divert world attention from its overt and covert support to terrorism. Terrorist action has taken a heavy toll of innocent lives. For over two years the normal life of the people in the State has been dislocated. A section of the population has been forced to flee State and take shelter outside. No doubt all efforts are being made to take care of the needs of those who have migrated, but the solution to the problem lies in their return to their own homes where they can be resettled safely.

Government has launched a massive operation against the terrorists with the help of the Army. All our efforts have been made to stop border infiltration. The recent efforts by terrorists to make massive intrusions across the Line of Control created a serious threat to peace in that area. Action, though belated, on the ground by Pakistan and diplomatic moves by the Government succeeded in meeting this grave threat. Some groups of terrorists have surrendered along with their arms. Discussions have been held in different fora to activate a meaningful interaction with the people. The Government is at the same time, continuing its efforts at increasing the pace of economic development in the State and expanding employment opportunities. An advisory Council has also been set up at the State level. Government would be willing to consider any dialogue within the framework of the Constitution to restore normalcy.

In the eastern part of the country, the Army had to be deployed in Assam from September, 1991 to restore peace and normalcy. The security forces have apprehended a number of ULFA activists and seized their weapons. Some activists have also surrendered voluntarily. ULFA has released all hostages and has unilaterally declared the suspension of its agitation. ULFA has shown willingness to hold negotiations with the Government to find an amicable solution to the problems of Assam within the framework of the Constitution. The army operations in Assam have been suspended, pending a dialogue with the ULFA.

A close watch is being kept on the situation arising out of the Ram Janma Bhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute. Government has enacted legislation to maintain the *status quo* of the other places of worship as they existed on 15th August, 1947. Action has been completed to set up a Foundation for Communal Harmony to take care of children of families affected by communal violence. One of the commitments of the Government was to establish a composite Rapid Action Force to quell communal riots. All necessary decisions in this regard have been taken. The Force has been raised.

It would be recalled that in the last session, Parliament has met a long standing demand of the people by enacting legislation to give the Union Territory of Delhi a Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers. Government has initiated steps for delimiting constituencies with a view to holding early elections.

In my last address, I had spoken of the need to take hard decisions to overcome the grim economic situation confronting the country. The Government has moved swiftly to deal with the crisis. The balance of payments problem has been successfully handled. Our reserves of foreign exchange today stand at over Rs. 10,000 crores. We have redeemed the gold we had pledged, and arrested the outflow of capital. International

confidence is being restored. At the same time, the Government has initiated steps to restructure the economy for greater productivity and growth. Changes have been made in industrial, fiscal and trade policies. This process of change will continue and will have to be extended to other important sectors of the economy.

The new industrial policy aims at consolidating the gains of the past decade, and imparting a fresh impetus to Indian industry for enhancing its efficiency and productivity. The policy has already shown significant results. In the period after the policy changes were announced the number of investment proposals have doubled compared to the same period last year. Approvals for foreign investment and technical collaboration also show a similar trend. Along with changes in the industrial policy, a policy package for support to small scale industry has been announced, the small scale and tiny sector will continue to play an important role in providing employment and contributing to industrial output. With the changes that have been brought about in the industrial policy, the State Governments have a major role to play in promoting industrial development. The Central Government will continue to interact with them to ensure that the benefits of the liberalised policy reach all corners of the country.

We place great emphasis on exports. Despite an unavoidable import compression of about 20 per cent, exports to General Currency Area countries have shown a modest growth of 6 per cent in dollar terms. External obstacles on exports to Rupee Payment Area have, however, affected overall export growth. Efforts are being made to restore trade with the Republic of the former Soviet Union, and framework agreements are being entered into with all of them.

The Government is fully conscious of the need to protect the interest of all those workers who may be affected by restructuring as contemplated by the new policies. A programme of retraining and re-deployment will be taken up, for which necessary funds will be provided. The strength of India lies in its working class. A Standing Tripartite Committee has been constituted to examine the impact of the New Industrial Policy on Labour and make recommendations from time to time on labour related problems. The National Commission on Rural Labour submitted its report last July and made a number of recommendations for improving the position of rural workers through creation of employment opportunities, provision of social security, strengthening existing laws and enactment of new legislation. Government is studying these recommendations.

The rise in prices is a matter of grave concern. Inflation is being caused, to a large extent, by the fiscal deficit. Once the fiscal deficit is reduced and brought under control inflation can be expected to come down to reasonable levels. Other possible administrative steps like dehoarding

measures and increase in release of foodgrains have been taken. The inflation rate has come down from over 16 per cent in August, 1991 to about 12 per cent at present. The Government will continue to monitor prices and take steps to reduce these further.

The economic policy changes initiated recently will form the basis for the Eighth Plan which envisages a growth rate of 5.6 per cent. This growth target is to be achieved by a proposed total outlay of Rs. 400,000 crore. The foremost objective of the Plan will be to generate increased employment. Other priorities of the Plan are eradication of illiteracy, universalisation of elementary education and providing drinking water and primary health facilities. The emphasis will be on people's involvement and in reaching out to the poorest and the most needy section of our people. The Eighth Plan will also focus on strengthening infrastructure. The Policy approach for the Eighth Plan has already been endorsed by the States at the recent meeting of the National Development Council and Government is confident that the economy will soon be on a sustainable and stable course of development.

Growth rates have been encouraging in several critical infrastructure areas like electricity, coal, steel and cement. Government is committed to further strengthening infrastructure. Every effort will be made to step up power supply and make it more stable. The development of atomic energy and non-conventional energy sources will receive high priority. The importance of effective communication system for the country's development cannot be over stated. These will be strengthened. Every effort will be made to increase the capacity and transport capability of the railway network. A new shipping policy is being initiated. A major restructuring of Indian Airlines and Air India is envisaged which will include modernisation of the fleet and support facilities. The network of telecommunication services, particularly in the rural areas will be substantially extended.

The progress made by the country in the field of science and technology is a matter of pride. To cite only a few, the indigenous fabrication of the second generation INSAT-2 series of satellites is proceeding according to schedule. INSAT-2A is expected to be launched next month. With the planned launching of Satellite Launch Vehicles, in the next one year, India will join the ranks of those few countries which have their own launch capability. The limitless potential of biotechnology which is of direct relevance to areas as diverse as agriculture, pisciculture and health will be exploited to the full. The exciting possibilities of electronics will be followed up so that it brings tangible benefits to our people. The development of the new contraceptive pill is yet another example of the benefits to be reaped through scientific advance. Even while reaching out to frontier areas, scientific and technological research must, in the final analysis, be closely linked to improving the quality of life of our masses.

While doing everything possible to accelerate the pace of progress, there must be environmental accountability all round on the part of Government, industry and people. A scheme of financial incentives and disincentives would supplement the normal regulatory measures to achieve this purpose. It is proposed to take up during the Eighth Five Year Plan, a scheme of associating tribals and rural poor in afforestation of degraded forests on a usufruct-sharing basis. The Wastelands Development Programme launched in 1985 will be strengthened and it is proposed to take up the integrated development of micro-watersheds in 50 districts in the country. With the experience gained in the cleaning of the river Ganga, the Government proposes to take up the cleaning of the major tributaries of this river and the grossly polluted stretches of other major rivers under the National River Action Plan. India looks forward to the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and will work towards ensuring that the Conference safeguards the interests of the developing countries.

One of the world's worst industrial tragedies took place in Bhopal on 2nd December, 1984. The aftermath of this event has scarred the lives of thousands of people. The Government of India had taken upon itself the responsibility to secure compensation for those affected and provide them relief. The legal processes have been completed by the directive of the Supreme Court on 3rd October, 1991. Government will ensure maximum relief to the victims.

The tourism sector has emerged as one of the largest foreign exchange earners providing employment to many. Government has launched a major initiative to accelerate growth of tourism in cooperation with the State Governments, travel trade and hotel industry. This has already started yielding results and the tourist arrivals have picked up, recording the highest level of international tourist arrivals in December 1991. The Government's tourism Action Plan includes tourist facilitation at international airports, liberalised charter policy, creation of special tourism areas for integrated development and intensive marketing of select destinations along with a major thrust to the promotion of domestic and low budget tourism. Our people must be provided with adequate facilities so that they get to see and know their own country better. With this in view Government will focus on youth tourism.

The foundation of our future security and progress lies to a great extent in agricultural growth. The dramatic progress we have made in agriculture, including in food crops, horticulture, fisheries, animal breeds and poultry, has a lot to do with progress in our research laboratories, but more than all else, it is the story of the life of the Indian farmer, his grit and determination. 1990-91 was the third agricultural year in succession when a new record in foodgrains production was achieved. During 1991-92

the South-West monsoon was erratic in its temporal and spatial behaviour, and some fall in production is likely. While our researchers are now producing technologies to offset the vagaries of weather, more intensive efforts have to be organised in the long term for improvement of land and productivity in rain-fed areas since 70 per cent of India's agriculture is based on rain-fed farming. The Government has already taken up massive programme for improving the productive potential of rain-fed land through improved crop practices, effective pest control, prevention of soil erosion and better *in situ* moisture conservation. During the Eighth Plan, horticulture, animal husbandry, live-stock development and agro-processing will be given high priority. Cooperative and research efforts will be intensified in the sheep, poultry and piggery sectors. Processing and marketing facilities in these and other areas will be strengthened, in order to create the right conditions for an increase in rural incomes. Research emphasis will be on increasing productivity of oilseeds, pulses and cereals, and diversification of agriculture for income and job generation, specially in the rural areas.

Recently, issues associated with the sharing and allocation of waters between States have been generating passions and tensions. It will have to be ensured that water, one of nature's precious gifts, is shared in an equitable manner in the larger national interest. Water is a flowing entity, variable in quantity from year to year and season to season. It should be managed in a harmonious manner in a spirit of understanding and cooperation between the areas served by it. Rivers should be a binding force for the people of different regions rather than a matter of discord. Every effort should be made to resolve through dialogue all disputes relating to the use of waters of any inter-State river. Should this not be possible, Government will ensure expeditious settlement of the disputes through the adjudication machinery set up by law for the purpose.

Effective measures are being taken to generate greater employment opportunities for the most disadvantaged sections through the Integrated Rural Development Programme and the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana. Special efforts will be made to expand employment opportunities for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women. No effort would be spared to provide safe drinking water to our people, on which depends the state of their health. All identified no source problem villages will be provided with a drinking water source by the end of 1992-93. In recognition of Shri Rajiv Gandhi's commitment to provide safe drinking water to the remotest of remote villages, Government have re-named the Technology Mission on Drinking Water for Rural Areas as the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission. Rural housing will receive special attention by improving the quality of implementation of the Indira Aawas Yojana. Government is committed to the strengthening of the Panchayati Raj Institutions so that effective political power rests with the people themselves. To this end, a Constitution Amendment Bill has been introduced in the Lok Sabha in September, 1991.

Poverty is no less acute in the urban areas. Employment generation and poverty alleviation schemes in the urban sector will be continued. A new National Housing Policy is on the anvil. The main objective of the new policy will be to create an enabling environment for housing activity and to assist people, in particular the vulnerable sections, to secure for themselves affordable shelters through access to developed land, building materials, finances and technology. Government is committed to the eradication of the dehumanising practice of manual scavenging through low cost sanitation schemes through a time bound programme. Schemes for conversion of dry latrines into low cost sanitation units have been already approved for over 740 towns in the country. Rehabilitation of those engaged in the practice of scavenging is also being undertaken. Government has decided to bring a legislation under article 252 of the Constitution making the practice of engaging manual scavengers an offence. A Constitution Amendment Bill has been introduced in the Lok Sabha with a view to strengthening urban local bodies so that they are able to provide better facilities and services to the people.

The Government is acutely conscious of the problems of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In respect of repeated incidents of atrocities against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, a special conference of Chief Ministers was held in October 1991 in order to focus on the need for the State Governments to pay special attention to deal with this problem. The State Governments have also been advised to identify tension-prone areas and to take special administrative measures to deal with them. In the context of job opportunities for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Government has been taking measures to increase their representation in Government departments, public sector undertakings and banks. With this objective in view the third special recruitment drive is under way at present. In accordance with the commitment given in my Address last year, a National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation has been set up with an authorised paid up capital of Rs. 200 crores to promote the economic development of the socially and educationally backward classes.

In my last Address I had mentioned that steps would be initiated for the effective implementation of the 15-Point Programme for the welfare of minorities which seeks to ensure that minorities are protected and that they are not discriminated against in the matter of employment in public services and benefits from development schemes. To realise this objective the 15-Point Programme is now being recast to make it more effective.

The Government has decided to confer statutory status on the Rehabilitation Council of India. The Council sets the standards for manpower training for rehabilitation of the disabled. Government has also decided to introduce legislation for setting up a National Trust for the welfare of persons suffering from mental retardation and cerebral palsy.

Government will give very high priority to the needs of children and women, the most vulnerable of groups in our society. Government will expand the ICDS programme during the Eighth Plan so as to cover the entire country. The girl child, will receive particular attention with focus on her nutrition, health and educational needs. Government is aware that mere legislative, administrative and judicial protection of women is not enough. The ultimate answer to the question of women's equality lies in their empowerment through organising them to defend their social and economic rights and in the creation of better income and self-employment opportunities. Government therefore would implement the Indira Mahila Yojana. Towards this end, Government has constituted the National Commission for Women.

Government attaches the highest priority to ensuring that no uncertainty whatsoever exists in the people getting their basic daily necessities. To this end, Government will make all out efforts to strengthen the Public Distribution System. The corner stone of the Government's policy here would be vigilance and supervision over distribution at the village level involving local initiatives and entrustment of these responsibilities to women in particular in order to fight leakages and malpractices. While efforts to improve the functioning of the Public Distribution System all over the country would receive attention, priority would be given to implement the revamped Public Distribution System in about 1700 blocks spread over the remotest and most backward areas of the country, such as those covered by the Integrated Tribal Development Projects, the Drought Prone Areas Programme, the Desert Development Programme, the Designated Hill Areas and Urban Slums. To ensure doorstep delivery of essential commodities to fair price shops, infrastructure and credit facilities would be improved and strengthened. Commodity coverage in the Public Distribution System would be broadened. Measures in this direction have already been initiated in close cooperation with the State Governments. The Essential Commodities Act, 1955 is being strictly enforced against hoarders and blackmarketeers to enhance and sustain availability of essential commodities and this drive will continue. The Government looks upon the Public Distribution System as the centre of a new social development focus to be imparted to its various anti-poverty programmes. Appropriate linkages will be forged with other programmes like the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana and the ICDS. All out efforts are being made to protect and promote the rights and interests of the consumers. At present 28 State Commissions and 360 district forums are functioning in the country under the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. The Chief Ministers have been requested to set up the remaining State Commissions and district forums and to ensure that they function effectively. Eighty-two per cent of the 33,851 complaints filed before the district forums have been decided in favour of the consumers. Government has recently received the Report of the High Power Working Group constituted

to suggest amendments to the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. The Report is presently under examination. The recommendations of the Working Group on the amendments required to make the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 more effective would be discussed in the Central Consumer Protection Council shortly.

Government is implementing 14 National Health Programmes including the Malaria Eradication Programme, Leprosy Eradication Programme, Control of Blindness and AIDS Control Programme. Kala Azar is being reported year after year and in recent times it has assumed epidemic proportions in Bihar. This needs to be tackled on a war footing. There is also the emerging problem of AIDS. Government has already prepared a programme to deal with this menace, taking into account, among others, the crucial factor of blood safety. There has been a dramatic reduction in the prevalence rates of leprosy and improvement in the discharge of patients. A comprehensive programme is proposed to be taken up to permanently upgrade ophthalmic facilities at the District and Community Health Centre levels. There has generally been a declining trend in the incidence of vaccine preventable diseases. Poliomyelitis cases have significantly declined. Declining trends in the case of whooping cough and diphtheria are also significant.

The rate at which our population is growing will put tremendous pressure on our resources. The Government has taken steps in recent months to evolve an integrated and holistic approach to achieve a marked decline in the birth rate. Towards this end an Action Plan has been drawn up which seeks to improve the quality and outreach of services. It is now proved that birth rates have remained high in areas with low female literacy, low age of girls at marriage and high infant and maternal mortality. It is in these areas that special efforts will be concentrated under the Action Plan. Particular attention will be given to 90 districts in the country which have a crude birth rate of over 39 per thousand. The Action Plan was scrutinized and endorsed by the National Development Council and at a meeting of State Health and Family Welfare Ministers. The National Development Council has also set up a Sub-Committee of Chief Ministers on Population Control to act as the focal point for all the measures under this Action Plan. The problem of population is not a concern confined merely to the Central and State Governments. Elected representatives, voluntary organisations, other leaders of public opinion—indeed each one of us, cutting across all sections of society, will have to participate in these efforts. A national consensus on this is the need of the hour and Parliament has to take the lead in this matter.

A National Policy on Education was adopted by Parliament in 1986 and its implementation commenced soon thereafter. Several developments in the sphere of education, and the Report of the NPE Review Committee, made it necessary to examine the need for modifications in the Education

Policy. The process of examination is soon to conclude and I am confident that the uncertainty in respect of the Policy will now be set at rest reiterating the main thrusts of the 1986 Policy. The National Literacy Mission which was launched by the late Shri Rajiv Gandhi in May 1988, has made significant strides. I share with you a sense of pride in the fact that all the districts of Kerala and Pondicherry*, as well as several in other States, have succeeded in eradicating illiteracy. Total Literacy Campaigns are at present being implemented in nearly 70 districts in the country. The campaigns in these districts will cover nearly 30 million illiterates in various age groups and would cost Rs. 210 crore. The campaigns are being implemented with the active cooperation and support of voluntary agencies. We, however, still have a long way to go and need to commit ourselves to the great and challenging task of freeing all parts of the country of illiteracy, particularly in the 15-35 age-group, by the end of the Eighth Plan. We have simultaneously to work towards universalisation of primary education comprising universal access, universal participation and universal achievement of minimum levels of learning. The formal system of primary education has been strengthened by a Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Operation Blackboard which is designed to provide necessary infrastructure. Nearly 3.8 lakh schools out of a total of 5.7 lakhs in the country have already been covered. More than 70,000 additional teachers have been appointed. Assistance from the Central Government to the tune of Rs. 620 crores has already been provided. In addition, to provide learning opportunities to those children who are not in a position to avail of formal school facilities, 2.45 lakh centres of Non-Formal Education are being conducted by State Governments. Another 27 thousand are being conducted by 410 voluntary agencies. Central assistance to the tune of Rs. 208 crores has been provided towards these efforts. We also need to effectively delink degrees from jobs and to give to the entire educational system a work and vocational orientation. A decision has already been taken to set up a Central Institute of Vocational Education under the National Council of Educational Research and Training. The Institute will actively promote the vocationalisation of education. The need to persist with attention to improvement of technical education is obvious. It is essential to create conditions for much greater rigour in teaching and research and to enlarge the number of institutions pursuing standards of excellence.

Events on the world scene have continued to unfold at an amazing pace since I last addressed Parliament in July last year. The intervening period has been an extremely active one in India's foreign policy.

The Government's foreign policy priorities are to maintain the unity and territorial integrity of India, to ensure our geopolitical security by creating a durable environment of stability and peace in our region and to build up a framework conducive for the economic well-being of our people by encouraging a healthy external economic environment. Within this overall

* Now known as Puducherry.

framework of priorities, we are of course not only conscious of our geographical location, but also are aware that our destiny lies in Asia, more specifically in South Asia. The very fact that the First Asian Relations Conference was convened by India as early as 1947 bears witness to the fact that this has been the central pillar of independent India's foreign policy from the very beginning. India's policies are geared to be a part of resurgent Asia as it is our hope that the 21st century would be an Asian century.

Strengthening relations with our neighbours on a bilateral basis as well as through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation is of the highest priority. The recent SAARC Summit held in Colombo last December should hopefully impart economic content to growing cooperation amongst the South Asian countries within the SAARC framework.

The recent visit of the Prime Minister of Nepal has ushered in a qualitatively new era of relations between the two countries resulting in opening very important areas of cooperation which will fortify the unique closeness of our ties, strengthened by the emergence of multi-party democracy in Nepal.

The recent visit of the Chinese Premier has been an important milestone in the further development of our relations. We have enhanced our mutual understanding through exchange of views on bilateral, regional and international issues at the highest level.

We are keen that the traditional friendly relations with Bangladesh are further expanded in the changed context with the advent of democracy in Bangladesh becoming an additional bond between the two countries.

We are committed to the strengthening and consideration of bilateral relations with Sri Lanka in keeping with the traditional and historical ties between the two countries. The voluntary return of Sri Lankan refugees back to their homeland, based on assurances received from Sri Lanka Government, commenced on 20 January, 1992 and is continuing.

Our close relations with Maldives are being further consolidated with a number of exchange of visits at high level between the two countries during 1991.

Periodic high level exchanges have helped maintain and strengthen close understanding and cooperation in our excellent relations with Bhutan.

Pakistan's negative approach towards India and its support to terrorism in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir continue to be the main impediments to normalisation of relations. The dangers inherent in its actions in violation of the Simla Agreement and universally accepted norms of inter-State conduct have been repeatedly pointed out to Pakistan. We have nevertheless

continued with our efforts to carry the confidence building processes and bilateral dialogue forward. Unfortunately, in the recent past, the Government of Pakistan and the Pakistan National Assembly have chosen to associate themselves with statements and actions that have vitiated the atmosphere. We hope that the Government of Pakistan will join us in serious endeavours to establish tension-free and good neighbourly relations between the two countries.

On 26th December 1991, we announced our decision to accord formal recognition to the Russian Federation and to all the other Republics of the erstwhile Soviet Union. Russia has assumed the role of a successor State and has taken over the seat of the erstwhile Soviet Union in the United Nations Security Council. We have sought to maintain our traditionally close relations not only with Russia but with the other republics as well. In addition to our Embassy in Moscow we plan to open Embassies in Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus and upgrade our Consulate General in Tashkent in Uzbekistan. A high level delegation recently visited Russia and Ukraine to establish a new framework of political relations with these independent republics and to review arrangements for maintaining our long standing trade and economic links with them. Several leaders from the Central Asian republics have visited and are expected to visit India during the next few months. During these visits, we shall seek to conclude appropriate agreements to promote our political, economic, commercial and cultural ties with these countries with whom we share historic bonds of friendship.

The values of democracy, individual liberty and respect for human rights which we share with the United States of America provide a strong basis for close cooperation between the two largest democracies of the world. Our expanding consultations in both bilateral and multilateral forms encompass a wide range of issues including peace, security and threats emanating from terrorism and drug-trafficking. The United States is our largest trading partner and a major source of technology. It has been supportive of our efforts to overcome our temporary economic difficulties and launch a far-reaching programme of economic reform. We look forward to a long-term and mutually rewarding economic partnership with the United States. The Prime Minister had a very useful meeting with President George Bush in New York during the recent UN Security Council meeting. There was strong mutual interest expressed in further consolidating and expanding our bilateral and multidimensional ties.

We attach special importance to our relations with countries of West Asia and North Africa. We have over the years extended consistent and unequivocal support to the Arab cause particularly to the Palestinian struggle for their just and inalienable rights. India has welcomed the reactivation of the West Asian peace process and the ongoing dialogue between Arab States and Israel to find a just and equitable settlement to the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Given the changed political realities in the region, India has decided to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. We look forward to establishing a comprehensive and multifaceted relationship with Israel.

India enjoys an enormous fund of mutual goodwill with African countries because of our consistent and effective support to the anti-colonial struggle in South Africa. We are proud that the liberation struggle in South Africa against apartheid has led to tangible reforms since 1990.

We have played a catalytic role in efforts to resolve the Cambodian conflict. India was among the countries specially mentioned in the Paris International Conference on Cambodia for facilitating the peace process.

We have demonstrated our support against attempts to institutionalise racial discrimination in Fiji by taking up the matter at the UN General Assembly from 1987 onwards and by opposing the re-entry of Fiji into the Commonwealth.

Japan's position as an economic superpower in the present world draws us closer to enlarge our bilateral cooperation on a wide range of matters of mutual concern which we believe is an important factor for peace and progress.

We have enjoyed age old cultural and bilateral ties with the countries of South-East Asia. This is a region which has made rapid progress in a very short time. The economic initiatives taken by the Government will create fresh opportunities for strengthening our economic interaction with this region. The Government attaches high priority to strengthening our relations with ASEAN and its member countries. We look forward to initiating our sectoral dialogue with ASEAN soon.

Europe's emergence following the Maastricht Summit meeting last December as a stronger political and economic entity in the modern world is of great significance. The European Community is our major trading partner and an important source of investment and we are keen to expand and strengthen further our cooperation. Our Prime Minister's first visit abroad was to Germany where he discussed with German leaders a wide range of subjects of mutual concern and cooperation between the two countries. We have also had a useful dialogue with other major European countries like the United Kingdom, France and Portugal.

With the sweeping changes brought about by recent events at the end of the Cold War and issues connected therewith, the new configuration is bound to assume a new North-South complexion, in the framework of a non-confrontationist context and methodology. The developing countries of the world will need to gear themselves for this new odyssey of development, aimed at the attainment of equitable prosperity all over the world. World peace and comprehensive disarmament would make an important

contribution to this ultimate vision of a happy and fulfilled humankind. India will work towards the realisation of this vision.

At the multilateral level, our participation has similarly been within our overall framework of priorities. The Non-aligned Movement is readjusting in a dynamic manner to the breathtaking pace of global developments. We have re-affirmed faith in its continued relevance. The independence of national decision making that is enshrined in its philosophy is today more relevant than ever before. In other multilateral fora such as the G-15 and the Commonwealth Summit, the Prime Minister not only articulated our views on important issues but also re-emphasised the need to restore the centrally and critically of development issues on the multilateral agenda. The Uruguay Round of negotiation has reached a crucial stage. We shall continue to defend our vital interests and seek improvements as we work towards the establishment of a fair and balanced multilateral trading system.

Environmental issues are fast moving to the forefront of international concern and attention. We are actively participating in multilateral cooperative efforts and supporting the forging of a global partnership which seeks to integrate the developmental needs of the developing countries in solutions to environmental problems.

We believe that given the global reach of nuclear weapons we need to follow a global approach with regard to nuclear disarmament issues. Partial or piecemeal measures such as Limited Nuclear Weapons Free Zone, therefore, seem to be of little utility and could even detract us from our ultimate goal.

The Summit level meeting of the UN Security Council on 31 January 1992 served to highlight the new and effective role that the UN has assumed in the wake of the momentous changes in the international situation. Our Prime Minister set forth at the meeting our position on some vital issues such as a new international consensus on a global non-proliferation regime, harmonisation of the defence of national integrity with respect for human rights and a just and fair world economic order. The meeting provided an opportunity for world leaders to exchange ideas on the future of the United Nations and to pledge their support to the new Secretary-General.

India is on the threshold of taking rapid and purposeful strides into the future. Conditions are being created so that there is an acceleration in the pace of development, our people can enjoy a better quality of life and India can hold her own in a rapidly changing world. The present is full of challenges as well as opportunities. Let us convert the challenges into opportunities. Let us not shy away from treading new paths. Let us be bold and innovative in our approach. The hardships of the present are only the harbingers of a brighter future. But even as we move into the future, let us be disciplined and resolute in our approach. Let us shun acrimony for

dialogue, violence for amity lest we be deflected into the by-lanes of history.

Honourable Members will be called upon to consider in this session important legislative business and other matters of great national importance. Your deliberations will, I am sure, be informed by reflection and wisdom. I now commend you to your tasks and wish you all success.

Jai Hind.