

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB  
MUKHERJEE AT THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE  
UTTARAKHAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

Dehradun: 18 May 2015

It is indeed a privilege for me to be present amidst you to attend the Special Session of the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly in this beautiful capital city of Dehradun. I thank Shri Govind Kunjawal, Honourable Speaker, Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly for his kind invitation to be amidst you today.

Uttarakhand has been described as '*Dev Bhoomi*' or the Abode of Gods. Nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, it is home to snow capped mountains and glaciers as well as the holiest of rivers, the Ganga and Yamuna. Further, the simplicity, warmth and hospitality of the people of this state is well known across the country.

Uttarakhand shares international boundaries with two of India's most important neighbours. On your north-east is China while in the south-east is Nepal. Recently, tragedy struck Nepal in the form of a series of earthquakes leading to large scale devastation and loss of human lives. I take this occasion to extend my deepest condolences to the families of our brothers and sisters in Nepal who have lost their lives in this tragedy. The Government of India is extending all possible help and support and we have assured the Government and people of Nepal that we are with them in their hour of need.

## **Honourable Members,**

The mountains of Uttarakhand are believed to be the chosen residence of the Gods. It is said the great Rishi Ved Vyasa wrote the Mahabharata here and Guru Dronacharya had his ashram near Dehradun. The Pandavas are believed to have stopped by Uttarakhand on their final journey. Jagat Guru Adi Shankaracharya visited Kedar Nath in 8th Century and according to some, attained nirvana here. The famous Advait Ashram established by Swami Vivekananda is situated at Mayawati in Champawat district of the State.

Some of the most sacred places of India are located in Uttarakhand. The Chardham Yatra encompassing Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath occupies a cherished place in the heart of most Indians. Haridwar draws people from all over the world who come to take a holy dip at Har ki Pauri. The state is also home to Shri Hemkunt Sahib and Piran Kaliyar which are visited by people in large numbers from India and abroad. One of the routes for the famous Kailash Mansarovar Yatra also passes through Uttarakhand.

I compliment all of you for the efforts made to rebuild the state after the natural disaster of 2013. It is reassuring to know that the Char Dham Yatra has begun on time this year and is attracting people in large numbers. I am also happy that the

Assembly has been united in its deliberations on how to face extraordinary situations like natural disasters.

**Honourable Members,**

Born in the year 2000, Uttarakhand has made significant progress since it became the 27th State of the Indian Union.

Uttarakhand has been a leader in efforts for sustainable development. The country's first effort at conservation of forests, the Corbett Park came up in 1936 in this region. It was the first Park of its kind, not only in the country, but in the whole of Asia. The world famous 'Chipko Movement' was launched by Gaura Devi, a simple village woman from the remote village of Raini in district Chamoli. It subsequently gained momentum under the leadership of Shri Sunderlal Bahuguna and other environmentalists.

The message of the popular Chipko Song -

*“Soil is ours, water is ours,  
Ours are these forests,  
Our forefathers raised them,  
it's we who must protect them”.*

will fill anyone's heart with joy.

The 12000 Van Panchayats which manage a sizeable portion of the State's forests through community participation

are an institution unique in the country. Uttarakhand also has the distinction of increasing its forest cover by more than 1100 sq.km. during the first 10 years of its existence.

Uttarakhand has successfully brought down the percentage of people living below the poverty line from 32.7% in 2004-05 to 11.3% in 2012. 99 per cent of the villages have been electrified in the State. Uttarakhand has registered an annual growth rate of about 10%. However, this growth has not been uniform and I believe hill areas lag behind.

I am happy to know that the State intends to make Gairsain in Chamoli district the summer capital of the State and construction of a new Vidhan Sabha Bhavan has started. The measures taken by the State Government to improve governance such as e-Treasury, computerization of land records, online delivery of public services, online grievance redressal mechanism etc. will surely be welcomed by the people. I also appreciate the green initiatives and process automation undertaken by this Assembly to move towards a paperless Legislature.

I congratulate the people of Uttarakhand who have participated actively in the democratic process overcoming physical and geographical barriers such as hilly and forest terrain. The voting percentage in the Assembly elections has steadily increased from 54.34% in the Assembly Elections of 2002 to 67.22% in the 2012 elections. Moreover, all three

elections witnessed a change in treasury benches. The hallmark of a vibrant democracy is that the ballot forms the basis of transition of power.

**Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly,**

The founding fathers of our Republic were convinced that the Parliamentary system was best suited to our ethos and genius. Dr. Ambedkar, the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee said: (and I quote)

*“Under the non-parliamentary system, such as the one that exists in the U.S.A., the assessment of the responsibility of the Executive is periodic. It is done by the Electorate. In England, where the Parliamentary system prevails, the assessment of responsibility of the Executive is both daily and periodic. The daily assessment is done by members of Parliament (in your case, the Legislative Assembly) through Questions, Resolutions, No-confidence motions, Adjournment motions and Debates on Addresses. Periodic assessment is done by the Electorate at the time of the election which may take place every five years or earlier. The daily assessment of responsibility, which is not available under the American system, is, it is felt, far more effective than the periodic assessment and far more necessary in a country like India. The Draft Constitution in recommending the Parliamentary system of Executive has preferred more responsibility to more stability.”* (Unquote)

Governing a country of the size and diversity of India and managing challenges that arise on account of region, language, ethnicity, caste and religion is a stupendous task. Yet, the Parliamentary system has taken deep roots in our soil and we have successfully conducted sixteen General Elections to the Lower House of Parliament as well as innumerable elections to our State Legislatures and local bodies. Our Parliamentary democracy today evokes awe and admiration across the world.

**Honourable Members of the Assembly,**

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 good governance and socio-economic transformation. The job of a legislator is a 24x7 responsibility. Legislators must at all times be committed to addressing the problems of the people. They must give voice to the grievances of the public by raising them on the floor of the Legislature and act as the link between people and the Government. They must always keep in mind that young and aspirational Indians expect them to be service providers. They will demand an account of how they have performed at the end of five years. Every one of us who are in an elected office must remember that the people are our masters. Each one of us is here because we solicited votes and received their endorsement.

The cardinal principle of effective functioning of the Parliamentary system is that majority will rule and minority will oppose, expose and if possible, depose. However, minority must accept the decisions of the majority while the majority must respect the views of the minority.

In the Assembly, discipline and decorum must be always maintained and rules, conventions and etiquette observed. Parliamentary practices, procedures and conventions are meant to provide for orderly and expeditious transaction of business of the House. Dissent should be expressed with decency and within the contours and parameters of Parliamentary devices. Democracy should comprise of the three 'D's - Debate, Dissent and Decision not the fourth 'D' 'Disruption'.

It is unfortunate that time devoted by legislators towards legislation has been gradually declining across the country. The Presiding Officers Conferences have time and again reiterated the need for holding a minimum of 100 days of sittings every year. With the heightened complexity of administration, legislation must be preceded by adequate discussion and scrutiny. If not, it will fail to deliver the desired results or meet its objectives. In particular, there is need for utmost caution in matters of legislation, money and finance. It must be kept in mind that no expenditure can be incurred by the Executive, no tax levied and no money withdrawn from the Consolidated Fund of the State without the approval of the Legislature.

It is a matter of satisfaction that the current Sixteenth Lok Sabha has assumed its role and responsibilities in right earnest. Until now, the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha has sat for 90 days and passed 55 Government bills. 24 bills were passed in the just concluded fourth session. Further, the House sat late for 55 hours and 19 minutes in the fourth session to transact urgent government business. 7 hours and 04 minutes were sadly lost due to interruptions and forced adjournments. Thankfully, this is less than in many previous sessions.

Let me add that a noteworthy feature of this Lok Sabha is that there are 318 first timers and the time spent on quality debate and discussion has gone up considerably. I am particularly happy the Constitution Amendment Bill relating to Land Boundary Agreement between India and Bangladesh was passed unanimously by both Houses of Parliament. The unanimous vote on the Bill has conveyed a strong message of friendship to Bangladesh and established to the world that India stands united on matters of great national importance.

I urge the Uttarakhand Assembly as well as other Assemblies to consider increasing the number of sittings so that issues of the state can be thoroughly discussed and debated. In order to bring people closer to the Legislatures, I suggest that our Legislative Assemblies establish museums for the public on legislative practices. They could also invite students to witness



sessions and organize capacity building programmes for members of local bodies such as Gram Sabhas and Panchayats.

**Honourable Members,**

Every legislator should ensure that the content and quality of debates that take place in the chambers are of the highest order. As members of different political Parties, individual Legislators would be guided by the policies of their respective Parties. However, issues of development and public welfare transcend political barriers. It should not be difficult to forge consensus on such issues.

In a parliamentary democracy, the oversight function of the Legislature is important and dynamic. Legislative oversight is a continuous process carried out in the Committees as well as the floor of the House. Legislators involvement in Committees such as Public Accounts Committee, Estimates Committee and the Departmental Standing Committees can help them develop expertise in the complex working of government departments.

The Question Hour provides a good opportunity to ask searching questions and hold the Executive accountable for its actions or inaction and to obtain assurances from the Ministries concerned. This is one of the important privileges of legislators and they must ensure that the Question Hour is fully utilized.

Let me narrate an anecdote to reinforce this point. Shri S. Satyamurti, a lawyer and outstanding orator, entered the Madras Legislative Council in 1923 and his fame as a legislator rapidly spread all over the country. He excelled himself in the Question Hour and became a master of the art of interpellation. He was known as the '*terror of the question hour*'. His brilliant and effective speeches earned him the name "*Trumpet Voice*". When the time came for elections to the Madras Legislative Council, Gandhiji declared it was enough if one Satyamurti was sent to the Legislatures. Shri Satyamurti's success as a member of the Central Legislative Assembly from 1935 to 1939 led Gandhiji to remark that if there had been ten Satyamurtis in our legislatures, the British would have quit long ago.

### **Honourable Members,**

I visited the beautiful state of Arunachal Pradesh in November 2013 and I was told that leaders of traditional tribal councils of the state called *Kebang* and *Buliang* recite a passage at the beginning of their meeting –

*"Villagers and brethren, let us strengthen our custom and our council, let us improve our relations, let us make the laws straight and equal for all, let our laws be uniform, let our customs be the same for all, let us be guided by reason and see that justice is done and compromise reached that is acceptable to both parties. Let us decide while the dispute is fresh, lest the small disputes grow big and continue for the long time. We have come together for a council meeting and*

*let us speak in one voice and decide our verdict. So let us decide and mete out justice.”*

Modern day legislators would do well to heed this sage advice of the tribal elders.

**Honourable Members,**

The Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly has over the years promoted the welfare of the people of the State through numerous progressive enactments. The time has now come to show leadership in catapulting the state to new heights. Uttarakhand has all the resources required to develop as a major destination for tourism and an important centre for horticulture. Uttarakhand has been a traditional seat of learning. The Indian Military Academy, Forest Research Institute, Lal Bahadur Shastri National Administration Academy, Wildlife Institute of India, Indian Institute of Petroleum and Govind Vallabh Pant Agriculture University are already located here. There is great scope for the state to emerge as an education, sports and IT hub of the country.

Education is the mantra that can transform our nation. I call upon each one of you to personally supervise the state of schools and colleges in your constituencies and ensure that students go to school, teachers teach and the best of education is provided. All of you are aware of the Namami Gange programme

and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. This state which is home to the holy rivers, a major destination for pilgrims and important centre of education must ensure the success of these programmes. Take upon yourself the goal of a Clean Ganga and Clean India!

**Honourable Members,**

The Gods have blessed your state and people with a wealth of beauty. I am confident your hard work, strong determination and conviction will result in happy and prosperous life for each and every citizen of the state.

Let me conclude with a few lines from the renowned poet of Uttarakhand, Shri Sumitranandan Pant

कोटि-कोटि हम श्रमजीवी सुत  
सर्व एक मत, एक ध्येय रत,  
जय भारत हे,  
जाग्रत भारत हे 1

which means:

We, the thousand toiling sons,  
All have one thought, one objective,  
Long live India, long live the awakened India.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.

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