

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRIMATI PRATIBHA DEVISINGH
PATIL, TO PARLIAMENT**

New Delhi, 12th March, 2012

Honourable Members

1. I welcome you to this session which marks the halfway of my Government. I hope this session will be productive and useful.

2. The current year has been a difficult one for the world economy. Economic uncertainties have had an adverse impact across the globe. There is increased political uncertainty and turbulence in the international system and the environment in which we operate has become more challenging over the last one year. Our economy grew at a handsome rate of 8.4 per cent in 2010-11, but it has slowed down to about 7 per cent this year. This remains a healthy growth given current global trends.

3. The long-term fundamentals of the Indian economy remain robust. India's growth prospects arise from factors such as high domestic savings and investment rates, favourable demographics, and a stable democratic polity. My Government is confident that it will soon steer the country back to the high growth trajectory of 8 to 9 per cent.

4. My Government has remained committed to providing an honest and more efficient Government and has taken several further important steps towards that end. A formidable and unprecedented array of Bills has been introduced in the Parliament. These include The Public Interest Disclosure and Protection of Persons Making the Disclosure Bill, the Prevention of Bribery of Foreign Public Officials and Officials of Public International Organisations Bill, Citizens' Right to Grievance Redress Bill, The Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill and The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Bill. India has also ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption. Together these have the potential of bringing about a transformational change in curbing corruption and enhancing transparency and accountability in governance. A comprehensive public procurement law is being formulated. The National Mission for Delivery of Justice and Legal Reforms has already been set up.

5. The Government has initiated action on various fronts to tackle the menace of black money. These include enactment of the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act, amendment of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, setting up of a special committee to examine measures to strengthen laws to curb black money generation in the country, and commissioning of studies by independent agencies to assess the quantum of black money both inside and outside the country. The framing of the General Anti-Avoidance Rules and Controlled Foreign Company Rules has been taken up under the proposed Direct Taxes Code. Efforts are underway to build political consensus on the Goods and Services Tax, which will give a major boost to the economy by rationalising indirect taxes and giving full input credit.

6. We are taking many steps to contain the generation and outflow of illicit funds from the country and for opening channels for getting wider information on black money from other countries. These include: the operationalization of new Income Tax Overseas Units, signing of new Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements and new Tax Information Exchange Agreements and better implementation of Transfer Pricing and International Taxation provisions.

7. Efficient and automated delivery of public services with minimum human intervention is one of the keys to reducing corruption. Under the National e-Governance programme, more than 97,000 Common Service Centres have been established across the country for making public services conveniently available to citizens. Departments responsible for Income Tax, Passports, Central Excise, and Corporate Affairs have started delivering online services. New e-Governance projects in education, health, public distribution and postal services will be launched. The Electronic Services Delivery Bill has been introduced in the Parliament. Increasingly, public services under all e-Governance projects will be delivered through internet and mobile phones.

8. To reach the millions of underprivileged people, my Government has launched a unique ADHAAR scheme which would help improve service delivery, accountability and transparency in social sector programmes and lead to their financial inclusion.

9. The year 2012-13 will mark the first year of the 12th Five Year Plan that sets the goal of 'faster, sustainable and more inclusive growth'. The Approach Paper sets a target growth rate of 9 per cent for the 12th Plan period with 4 per cent growth for the agriculture sector.



The President, Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil being led in a ceremonial procession to the Central Hall of Parliament House to address the Joint Session of the Parliament on Budget Session, in New Delhi on March 12, 2012. The Vice President, Shri Mohd. Hamid Ansari, the Speaker, Lok Sabha, Smt. Meira Kumar, the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh and the Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and Water Resources, Shri Pawan Kumar Bansal are also seen.

10. My Government will work on five important challenges that our country faces today:

- to strive for livelihood security for the vast majority of our population and continue to work for removal of poverty, hunger and illiteracy from our land;
 - to achieve economic security through rapid and broad based development and creation of productive jobs for our people;
 - to ensure energy security for our rapid growth;
 - to realize our developmental goals without jeopardizing our ecological and environmental security;
- and
- to guarantee our internal and external security within the framework of a just, plural, secular and inclusive democracy.

11. The objective of livelihood security is best achieved through a process of rapid and inclusive growth based on empowering the citizens of the country through education and skill development. Building on the platform provided by the Right to Education, integration of skill training with education at all levels is being emphasized. A National Vocational Education Qualification Framework is being developed to set common principles and guidelines for a nationally recognized qualification system.

12. My Government aims to provide skill training to 85 lakh people during 2012-13 and 800 lakh people during the 12th Plan. The Government will set up 1500 new Industrial Training Institutes and 5000 Skill Development Centres under Public Private Partnership at an estimated cost of ₹ 13,000 crore.

13. The Higher Education and Research Bill has been introduced in the Parliament. A National Commission for Higher Education & Research is being constituted to set a road-map for the future.

14. The teacher is at the core of the education system. My Government intends to launch a National Mission for Teachers aimed at improving teacher education and faculty development.

15. To provide all students opportunities to access higher education irrespective of their paying capacity, my Government intends to set up a Higher Education Credit Guarantee Authority for providing limited credit guarantees through risk-pooling for educational loans.

16. Recognizing the significance of education for empowerment, my Government has recently enhanced post-matric scholarship rates for students belonging to Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes after enhancing the scholarships for Scheduled Caste students. During the past one year, over 1.5 crore students belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and Minorities have been awarded scholarships and fellowships.

17. People need to be healthy if they have to learn, earn and lead a productive and fulfilling life. Our National Rural Health Mission has started making a difference as reflected in the health indicators. The Infant Mortality Rate has declined from 58 per thousand live births in 2005 to 47 in 2010 and Maternal Mortality Ratio has declined from 254 per one lakh deliveries in 2004-2006 to 212 in 2007-2009. The Janani Suraksha Yojana registered impressive gains with 1.13 crore women benefitting during 2010-11. Polio has been almost eradicated from the country. The World Health Organisation has decided to take India off the list of countries with active endemic wild poliovirus transmission.

18. In spite of the increased investment in health sector over the last 7 years, public expenditure on healthcare continues to be low. To attain the goal of universal healthcare, my Government would endeavour to increase both Plan and Non-Plan public expenditure in the Centre and the States taken together to 2.5 per cent of the GDP by the end of the 12th Plan. Universal access to free generic essential medicines in public health institutions in a phased and time bound manner will be ensured. The National Rural Health Mission will be converted into a National Health Mission covering urban areas also, in the course of the 12th Plan. My Government launched The National Programme for Prevention & Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases & Stroke and The National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly. We will strengthen district hospitals to provide advanced level secondary care. My Government is also working to end the shortage of human resources in health sector. Over the last three years there has been a 26 per cent increase in MBBS seats and 62 per cent increase in post graduate seats.

19. Drawing upon our rich heritage, Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) are being integrated with allopathic health care services. The States are given financial support for providing AYUSH facilities at Primary Health Centres, Community Health Centres and District Hospitals.

20. The immensely popular Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana, under which health insurance cover is already being provided to around 2.64 crore families, will be expanded. It is expected that by the end of the 12th Plan around 7 crore families will be provided health insurance cover under this scheme.

21. Mal-nutrition has been seriously impacting children, affecting their chances of gaining education and earning sustainable livelihood. My Government will restructure and strengthen the Integrated Child Development Services during the 12th Five Year Plan. In addition to the ICDS, a Multi-sectoral Nutrition Programme will be launched in 200 High-burden Districts to address maternal and child nutrition needs.

22. My Government is committed to the development of the weak and vulnerable sections of our society. We will make major amendments to the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act to prohibit employment of children under 14 years of age. Their place is in schools and not at the workplace.

23. In order to safeguard and promote the livelihoods of millions of street vendors, my Government is working on a legislation.

24. My Government will introduce a new Bill in the Parliament for eliminating manual scavenging and insanitary latrines. This will also provide for proper rehabilitation of manual scavengers in alternative occupations so that they are able to lead a life of dignity.

25. A separate Department of Disability Affairs is proposed to be set up for greater focus on addressing issues confronting persons with disabilities. The Government is considering a new legislation for persons with disabilities to replace the existing Act.

26. My Government is setting up a National Council for Senior Citizens as a broad-based participatory forum for this important segment of our population.

27. To help disadvantaged forest dwellers, more than 12.46 lakh titles have been distributed under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act. Introduction of a scheme for Minimum Support Price for minor forest produce is being considered.

28. My Government will consolidate the gains of the Prime Minister's New 15-Point Programme which earmarks 15 per cent of the targets and outlays of identified Government schemes for disadvantaged sections of minority communities. The Multi-Sectoral Development Programme for Minority Concentration Districts has succeeded in committing an investment of over ₹ 3500 crore in socio-economic infrastructure in 90 minority concentration districts. This programme will be strengthened and its reach will be expanded during the year.

29. The outstanding loans to minority communities by public sector banks have increased to 14.5 per cent of priority sector lending for the year 2011-12. My Government will strive to reach the target of 15 per cent during the year 2012-13.

30. With a view to ensuring empowerment of minorities, my Government has recently decided to provide a sub-quota of 4.5 per cent for socially and educationally backward classes of citizens belonging to minorities, within the 27 per cent reservation for Other Backward Classes.

31. I am happy that my Government's continued emphasis on Agriculture has yielded fruit. The agricultural sector has grown at 6.6 per cent during 2010-11, the highest growth rate recorded in recent times. The country witnessed a record production of 241.56 million tonnes of food grains during 2010-11. We have achieved record production of fruits and vegetables at 231 million tonnes, pulses at 18 million tonnes, oilseeds at 31.1 million tonnes, and cotton at 33.42 million bales. My Government incentivized public investment in agriculture through its flagship programmes like the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, the National Food Security Mission and the National Horticulture Mission. The pro-farmer price support policy of my Government of the last 7 years is being continued. During the year 2011-12 the minimum support prices of selected agricultural commodities were raised by 10 to 40 per cent over the previous year.

32. Credit to agriculture reached about ₹ 4,60,000 crore in 2010-11 which is 22 per cent above the target. I am confident that the 2011-12 target of ₹ 4,75,000 crore will be achieved. An interest subvention scheme was implemented to ensure the availability of crop loans to small farmers for loans up to ₹ 3 lakh at the rate of 7 per cent per annum. An additional subvention of 3 per cent is being provided to such farmers who repay their short-term crop loan in time, reducing their effective interest rate to 4 per cent.

33. My Government will take steps to reduce the gap of about 10 million hectare between the irrigation potential created and the irrigation potential utilized by strengthening the Command Area Development Programme and merging it with the Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme. The National Water Mission will be implemented with focus on improving water use efficiency by 20 per cent in five years. My Government will make efforts to realize the farming potential of rain-fed and dry land areas by ensuring healthy participation by all stakeholders and convergence of various Government sponsored programmes.

34. Availability of all subsidized fertilizers has been ensured as per the requirements during the year. The Ministry is working on a comprehensive fertilizer monitoring system which would present information on fertilizer availability to the farmers through SMS, internet and telephone. My Government has decided to revive eight urea units of Fertilizer Corporation of India and Hindustan Fertilizer Corporation to create an extra installed capacity of 9 million tonnes of urea. We are aiming to achieve self-sufficiency in urea production in the next five years.

35. As I had announced in my address to the Parliament in June, 2009, my Government has introduced The National Food Security Bill in the Lok Sabha in the last winter session. This will provide the statutory framework for assuring food security. My Government is simultaneously working with the State Governments towards complete computerization of the Public Distribution System.

36. My Government will continue to focus on ensuring greater transparency, efficiency and accountability in the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme. Since its inception, about 1100 crore man-days of employment has been generated and nearly ₹ 1,48,000 crore has been spent . The scheme has benefitted 25 crore people so far. The guidelines of the Scheme have been revised to ensure that it can be better aligned with the objective of raising land productivity.

37. My Government has launched the National Rural Livelihood Mission to enable poor rural households to access employment opportunities on a sustainable basis.

38. To underline inclusive growth, my Government will work for the early enactment of the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill which provides for a liberal regime of compensation along with a mandatory rehabilitation and resettlement package, not only for land owners but also for those dependent on such land for livelihood.

39. With a view to improving rural infrastructure, my Government launched the ambitious Bharat Nirman programme in 2004. The second phase of this programme began in 2009. I am happy to state that the cumulative targets of creating additional irrigation potential of 1 crore hectares, providing electricity to 1 lakh villages and 1.75 crore poor households, upgrading 1.94 lakh kilometres of existing rural roads and providing safe drinking water to identified habitations, have been achieved well before 31st March, 2012, the targeted date.

40. To secure livelihoods in the urban areas, my Government will soon launch the National Urban Livelihoods Mission for imparting large scale skill up-gradation, enabling entrepreneurship development, and providing wage employment and self-employment opportunities.

41. My Government will be launching the next phase of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission in the light of the experience gained in the functioning of the Programme. The focus of the Mission will now shift from metropolitan cities and large towns to Class I and medium towns.

42. As part of our continuing efforts for providing sustainable and environment-friendly urban transportation, my Government will be taking up Phase-III of the Delhi Metro this year and requisite financial assistance will be provided for speedy implementation of Metro projects in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Chennai. My Government has also decided to support preparation of feasibility reports for Metro Rail projects for all cities with population over 20 lakh people.

43. My Government proposes to introduce a Bill to provide for a uniform regulatory environment that would protect consumer interests, help speedy adjudication and ensure orderly growth of the real estate sector.

44. The needs of the urban homeless and destitute are of the highest priority for my Government, and I am happy to announce a new scheme called the "National Programme for the Urban Homeless" that would help create a network of composite shelters in the urban local bodies, with adequate provisions for housing and food for the destitute.

45. The Tourism sector has tremendous potential for job creation. My Government will target 12 per cent annual growth in this sector in the Twelfth Five Year Plan. In 2012-13, about 50 lakh jobs will be generated. The number of foreign tourist arrivals in 2011-12 is around 63 lakh, an increase of 9 per cent over the previous year.

46. My Government has undertaken a time-bound programme to convert the entire analog cable television system to digital by December, 2014. This will create a more equitable and transparent system and provide better viewing experience at affordable cost.

47. In order to extend FM radio services to millions living in small towns and remote areas, my Government has taken a significant decision to e-auction 839 FM Radio Channels in 245 cities across the country including in border areas of Jammu & Kashmir and the North East.

48. For further ensuring the welfare of handloom weavers my Government recently announced a financial package of ₹ 3884 crore for waiver of loans of handloom weavers and their societies. A comprehensive package of ₹ 2362 crore has also been announced for providing cheap credit and subsidized yarn to weavers.

49. For investments in textile industry, my Government has approved the Restructured Technology Up-gradation Fund Scheme and nearly doubled its outlay for the Eleventh Plan period from ₹ 8000 crore to ₹ 15,000 crore.

50. Inflation, particularly in food articles, has been a major challenge in many countries including India. Rising global prices of commodities, industrial materials and fuels have contributed to inflation. The Government has taken several measures to ease the supply constraints, like reduction in import duties and a calibrated ban on exports. In order to ease the pressure of high international prices on fuels, custom duty on crude oil and import duty on petrol and diesel has been reduced.

51. Strong policy actions by RBI and effective measures by the Government of India have yielded results. Inflation in primary food articles fell sharply, giving relief to the common man. General inflation has also eased.

52. The Government has taken various steps to attract overseas capital to India by liberalizing rules regarding External Commercial Borrowings, increasing the limits on lending by Foreign Institutional Investors and launching of schemes to attract investment in mutual funds and equity from Qualified Foreign Investors.

53. The Government has set up the Financial Sector Legislative Reforms Commission to help rewrite and harmonize financial sector legislation, rules and regulations to address contemporary requirements.

54. My Government has undertaken a number of e-Governance initiatives for improving tax-payer services, transparency, accountability and efficiency in the direct and indirect tax administration in India. The e-filing of income tax returns, e-payment of taxes, ECS facility for electronic refunds directly in taxpayers' bank accounts and electronic filing of TDS returns are now available

throughout the country. A Single Window System, called Aayakar Seva Kendra, for computerized registration of all taxpayers' applications including paper income tax returns, has been introduced.

55. India's merchandise exports touched US\$ 298 billion during 2011 registering a growth of more than 34 per cent over 2010. My Government has prepared a roadmap to double our merchandise exports to US\$ 500 billion by 2013-14. Comprehensive economic partnership agreements with Japan, Malaysia, Republic of Korea and a Free Trade Agreement with ASEAN have come into force. Negotiations with the European Union and a number of other countries are underway.

56. Under the Financial Inclusion Plan, nearly 73,000 habitations with population of over 2000 have been identified for extending banking services through banks or technology based banking solutions. By November, 2011, over 49000 villages had been covered. In order to promote the Self Help Groups, particularly those run by women, guidelines have been formulated to involve Non-Government Organizations.

57. My Government intends to recapitalise the Public Sector Banks to the extent necessary to maintain their financial health. The process to recapitalise 40 Regional Rural Banks has also been started.

58. My Government is preparing a Mission Plan 2012-2022 for the Indian electrical equipment industry. To promote electric automobiles, the National Board of Electric Mobility and the National Council of Electric Mobility have been formed. A scheme for promotion of the capital goods industry will be launched during the 12th Five Year Plan. A Policy for acquisition of raw material assets abroad has been instituted.

59. My Government has announced a National Manufacturing Policy which aims at augmenting the share of manufacturing in GDP to 25 per cent within this decade and creating 10 crore new jobs. Government will be establishing National Investment and Manufacturing Zones to promote growth in manufacturing.

60. The iconic Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor being developed along the Western Dedicated Rail Freight Corridor between Dadri and Navi Mumbai has made significant progress. My Government has decided to provide ₹ 17,500 crore to the DMIC over a period of five years for implementation of trunk infrastructure projects and another ₹ 1000 crore for project development activities.

61. The Government has recently approved the Public Procurement Policy for goods produced and services rendered by Micro and Small Enterprises with a special provision for enterprises owned by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

62. To promote a strong competition culture, my Government is finalizing the National Competition Policy. The revised Companies Bill has been introduced in the Parliament.

63. My Government accords high priority to development of adequate and quality infrastructure to enable India to achieve sustainable and inclusive economic growth and make India a globally competitive economy. To meet the challenge of mobilizing resources for infrastructure, my Government has taken a number of initiatives such as issuing regulations for setting up Infrastructure Debt Funds to tap pension and insurance funds for the first time. A uniform definition of Infrastructure is also being finalised.

64. In order to promote private sector participation in creation of infrastructure, the Government has included additional sub-sectors under the Scheme for Financial Support to Public Private Partnerships in Infrastructure under the Viability Gap Funding Scheme. These include capital investment in the creation of modern storage capacity including cold chains and post-harvest storage, education, health and skill development.

65. We need to significantly upgrade and expand our infrastructure. My Government is making efforts to increase port capacity. Rail and road connectivity to ports is being improved. Possibilities are being explored to take up more inland water transport projects particularly in the North East.

66. A comprehensive modernization programme of Railways is being launched. More dedicated freight corridors, in addition to the eastern and western corridors already in progress, will be built to segregate freight and passenger train operations.

67. My Government continues to give priority to road development. Projects for construction of at least 7000 kms of roads will be awarded this year. Initiatives have been taken to ensure transparency by switching to e-procurement and e-tendering.

68. Measures will be taken to protect the interests of air travellers. A Bill will be introduced this year for a Civil Aviation Authority to ensure safe, secure and affordable air services. An independent Air Accident Investigation Bureau will be constituted. Air traffic management services and airports will be upgraded and modernized.

69. My Government is taking all measures to step up the domestic production of oil and gas. The 9th round of New Exploration Licensing Policy has commenced. Bharat Oman Refinery Limited, a joint venture of BPCL and Oman Oil Company with refining capacity of 6 million metric tonnes per annum, was commissioned in June 2011.

70. My Government is working to connect all people across the country. Today there are 76 telephone connections for every 100 persons. My Government is working on new policies on Telecom, Information Technology and Electronics. A National Optical Fibre Network is being created at a cost of ₹ 20,000 crore for providing Broad-band connectivity to all Panchayats. Suitable measures are being put in place to facilitate the domestic manufacture of IT hardware.

71. As we expand our economy our energy requirements are expected to more than double in a decade. There are major achievements on the power generation front. Capacity addition in the 11th plan period is likely to be around 52,000 MW as against 21,000 MW in the 10th plan period. In 2011-12 alone we are likely to add a record 15,000 MW.

72. Under the Restructured Accelerated Power Development Reforms Programme, projects of around ₹ 30,000 crore have been sanctioned in about 1400 identified towns. For strengthening the distribution networks in other areas, my Government has approved the setting up of the National Electricity Fund that would provide interest subsidy on loans disbursed to the State Power Utilities. The Fund aims at galvanizing an investment of around ₹ 25,000 crore in the next two years. The Government has initiated steps to ease the supply of fuel for power generation.

73. We need new and renewable ways to cater to our energy demands. Solar power projects of around 400 MW are planned to be added by the end of the current financial year under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission. One of the objectives of the Mission is to bring the cost of solar power generation closer to grid parity levels. I am happy to inform you that recent tariff bids are 50 per cent less than they were when the Mission was launched just two years ago.

74. The installed capacity of nuclear plants in the country has risen to 4780 MW, and is expected to further increase to 10,080 MW by the end of the 12th Plan. My Government attaches the highest priority to safety while harnessing nuclear energy, and will not compromise on safety or the livelihood of any section of society in the pursuit of our nuclear energy programme. After the Fukushima accident in Japan in March 2011, my Government ordered technical reviews of all safety systems of nuclear power plants in the country. The reports were made public and their recommendations for enhancing safety are being implemented. The Nuclear Safety Regulatory Authority Bill has been introduced in the Parliament.

75. My Government introduced the Mines and Minerals (Development & Regulation) Bill in the last session of the Parliament. The Bill aims at putting in place a legislative framework that would accelerate investments and infuse advanced technology in the mining sector and ensure that proceeds from mining activities are available for developing the areas affected by it and maintaining environmental balance.

76. India played a constructive and leading role in reaching positive outcomes in the international climate change talks held in Durban in December 2011. We will continue to engage with the international community.

77. My Government attaches utmost importance to the conservation of our environment and biodiversity. The National Ganga River Basin Authority is galvanizing the efforts of the Centre and the States for cleaning the river in a holistic manner. Pollution abatement works of about ₹ 2600 crore have been sanctioned by the Authority in the last three years.

78. I am happy to say that India is hosting the 11th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biodiversity in Hyderabad in October, 2012. My Government will endeavour to use this Conference to bring about global consensus and forward-looking action on initiatives like operationalization of access and benefit sharing mechanisms. It would also promote community participation in conservation of resources.

79. My Government has revised and strengthened the Project Tiger Scheme with a Central assistance of over ₹ 1200 crore for the Eleventh Plan Period. A special Programme for re-introducing the extinct Cheetah has also been instituted.

80. A national mission for a Green India has been mooted under the National Action Plan on Climate Change for increasing the forest cover and improving its quality over 10 million hectares.

81. India's rightful place in the comity of nations hinges on our ability to achieve socio-economic transformation through scientific and technological excellence. My Government will persevere in its efforts to increase the expenditure on Research & Development from 1 per cent to 2 per cent of GDP. Public investment in Research & Development has grown at 20 to 25 per cent each year during the 11th Plan period. Government has successfully introduced the Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research or INSPIRE scheme and more than 5 lakh science students have been given awards till now.

82. A number of institutional initiatives have been taken to facilitate innovation in the field of science & technology. A Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council is being set up as a not-for-profit company to facilitate the growth of biotech industry to help small and medium enterprises. To focus on socio-economic issues of national importance that have linkage with science & technology, an Academy for Science Policy Implementation and Research or ASPIRE has been set up. The Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research has also been set up.

83. The Monsoon Mission programme launched by my Government will enable us to significantly improve monsoon prediction for the benefit of our farmers. The coverage of farmers under the agro-meteorological services will be raised from the current level of 10 per cent to around 40 per cent in the next Plan period. Integrated ocean information advisory services will be extended to 90 per cent of coastal fishermen in our country.

84. My Government pursued the utilization of space technologies for national benefit. Eight satellites were launched successfully. The communication satellite GSAT-8 was put into orbit. Several major satellite launches are planned for 2012, including India's first microwave remote sensing satellite with all-weather imaging capability and India's first navigational satellite. We propose to conduct the next flight of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle using the indigenous cryogenic upper stage in 2012.

85. Our Armed Forces are known for their professionalism, discipline and devotion to duty. The Government of India is committed to ensuring the welfare of all our Servicemen and Ex-servicemen.

86. Active measures are being undertaken to maintain the three Services as a modern and evolving force that is capable of meeting the security challenges of the future, including coastal security. Our focus is on enhancing domestic defence production capabilities as well as achieving technological self-reliance in weapons and delivery systems. In the years ahead, our aim is to make our Armed Forces among the technologically most advanced in the world. Recent milestones in this direction include the launch of the Agni-IV missile and the proposed induction of the Light Combat Aircraft, Tejas, into the Indian Air Force.

87. The Central Armed Police Forces protect our borders and our hinterland with equal valour and sacrifice. For these forces, my Government is setting up the first medical institute and super speciality hospital as a mega health care infrastructure project.

88. In the area of internal security my Government has launched a number of measures towards development of areas affected by Left Wing Extremism. The Integrated Action Plan with an outlay of ₹ 3,300 crore in the last two years has brought development to the villages in the most backward and violence-affected districts of the country. The Plan, which was being implemented so far in 60 districts, has been extended to 78 districts.

89. My Government has shown that acts of violence can be contained with a firm but humane approach. The security situation in the North Eastern States and Jammu & Kashmir has shown considerable improvement during the last year. My Government has always been willing to enter into dialogue with any group willing to abjure the path of violence. It is encouraging that a number of organisations have come forward seeking resolution of their grievances in a peaceful manner.

90. A major success achieved in Jammu & Kashmir was the conduct of the Panchayat elections after a long gap. It received an overwhelming response from the people with more than 80 per cent voter turnout. More than one crore pilgrims had 'Darshan' of Mata Vaishno Devi during 2011. The Special Industry Initiative Scheme known as "Udaan" and the Skill development and Employment Scheme called "Himayat" have been launched for the youth of Jammu & Kashmir. While "Udaan" aims at targeting 40,000 youth for skill development, "Himayat" would be covering one lakh youth in the next 5 years at a cost of ₹ 235 crore. More than 1,000 trainees have already been given placement letters in different sectors.

91. The bomb blasts on July 13, 2011 in Mumbai and September 7, 2011 in Delhi were a grim reminder that terrorist modules continue to be active in the country. In 2011, eighteen terrorist modules were neutralized. The National Intelligence Grid and the National Counter Terrorism Centre aim to improve India's capability to counter internal security threats.

92. In deference to the long cherished wishes of the people of the region, my Government signed a tripartite agreement for setting up of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration. Another tripartite Memorandum of Settlement has been signed with United People's Democratic Solidarity in Assam. A non-lapsable central pool of resources has been created to cover the gaps in funding requirements of central Government projects in the North-East.

93. In the realm of foreign affairs my Government has pursued a policy of promoting peace and cooperation in our immediate neighbourhood and beyond to enable us to achieve our goals of socio-economic development and national security. My Government remains firmly committed to the success of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. We wish to see all nations in South Asia prosper, enjoy stability and realise their true potential through the broadening of regional economic cooperation, trade and infrastructure development.

94. This process received significant impulses from the visits of the Prime Minister to Afghanistan, Bangladesh and the Maldives and the visits of the President of Myanmar, His Majesty the King of Bhutan, the President of Afghanistan and the Prime Minister of Nepal to India.

95. The Protocol on the Land Boundary Agreement between India and Bangladesh paves the way for settlement of long standing issues and a mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation. My Government also initiated steps for resettlement and rehabilitation of the internally displaced persons in Sri Lanka.

96. We are committed to resolving all outstanding issues with Pakistan through dialogue. We look forward to building upon the progress made so far mindful of the need for Pakistan to take credible action against terrorist groups and the related infrastructure on its soil.

97. India's 'Look East' policy has resulted in a significantly deeper engagement with countries of East Asia and South-East Asia. We were privileged to have the Prime Minister of Thailand as the Chief Guest for this year's Republic Day celebrations. India will, for the first time, host a commemorative India-Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit in December this year to mark twenty years of our dialogue partnership.

98. India has a vital stake in the peace, stability and progress of the countries of West Asia and North Africa. Over six million Indians live and work in the Gulf region. We would like the people of the region to chart their own pathways to nation building and development at this historic time of transition and change. We are unwavering in our support to the Palestinian cause.

99. Our traditional relationship with Africa received a fresh impetus following the second Africa-India Forum Summit which was held for the first time in Africa last year. Our ambitious Pan African e-Network project has been commissioned in 47 out of 54 countries in the African continent.

100. The visit by the Head of State of Slovenia to India, my visits to Austria and Switzerland and the Vice-President's visit to Turkey consolidated our political relations with Central Europe. The Prime Minister's visit to Kazakhstan and the visit of the President of Uzbekistan to India added new impetus to our relations with Central Asia.

101. Our partnerships with the major world powers continue to develop. The United States is a valued strategic partner with whom we have a multi-faceted relationship based on our national interests. India's special and privileged Strategic Partnership with Russia was further strengthened during Prime Minister's visit to Russia last year. We attach high priority to the development of our Strategic and Cooperative Partnership with China. The rapid growth of our trade and economic relations with China has significance not only for our bilateral relationship, but for the global economy as a whole. India's relations with the European Union and its Member-States are based on shared values and expanding commercial, economic and people to people exchanges. India's relations with Japan continue to expand in the economic as well as security spheres based on strong political will on both sides.

102. India played an active part in the G-20, BRICS and IBSA processes. We look forward to shortly hosting the next BRICS Summit in India. As a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, we have sought to work with the rest of the world in efforts to maintain international peace and security while respecting the established principles of international law, national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

103. My Government has embarked upon a comprehensive overhaul of the Passport issuance system through the mission-mode "Passport Seva Project" which is expected to be fully implemented during the current year. An Integrated online Visa application system under the Immigration, Visa and Foreigners Registration & Tracking scheme is under implementation.

104. The overseas Indian community is a vibrant element of India's civilizational and cultural ethos. Last year, my Government undertook Operation Safe Homecoming to evacuate over 16,000 Indian nationals from Libya in view of the deteriorating situation in that country. We also made arrangements for evacuation of Indian nationals from Egypt and Yemen following disturbances in those countries. A Bill has been introduced in the Parliament to streamline and merge the People of Indian Origin and Overseas Citizen of India schemes by amending the Citizenship Act.

105. Hon'ble Members, my Government is showing a new path towards rapid development and modernisation based on the belief that a prosperous society can be built on the principles of humanity, equality and fraternity which the founding fathers of our nation so cherished. We are presenting a new template of a society where livelihoods can be secured for millions of underprivileged and the aspirations of our youth for a better life can be met; a society where massive developmental projects do not impinge on the security of the ecology and environment; a society that is open, democratic and transparent, but where national security is always paramount.

106. Hon'ble Members, Parliament has a heavy agenda. I hope that all of you will work together in a spirit of constructive cooperation to discharge the business before the two Houses. I offer my best wishes to you in your task of fulfilling the aspirations of the people.

Jai Hind!